OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER™

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

INSIDE THE HORACE TRILOGY

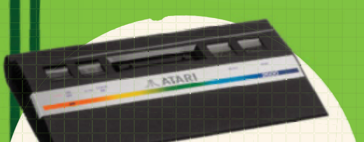


PLUS

TOY STORY AMIGA CD32
UMIHARA KAWASE **IMAGIC**
PAUL CLANSEY SYNDICATE

Pokémon

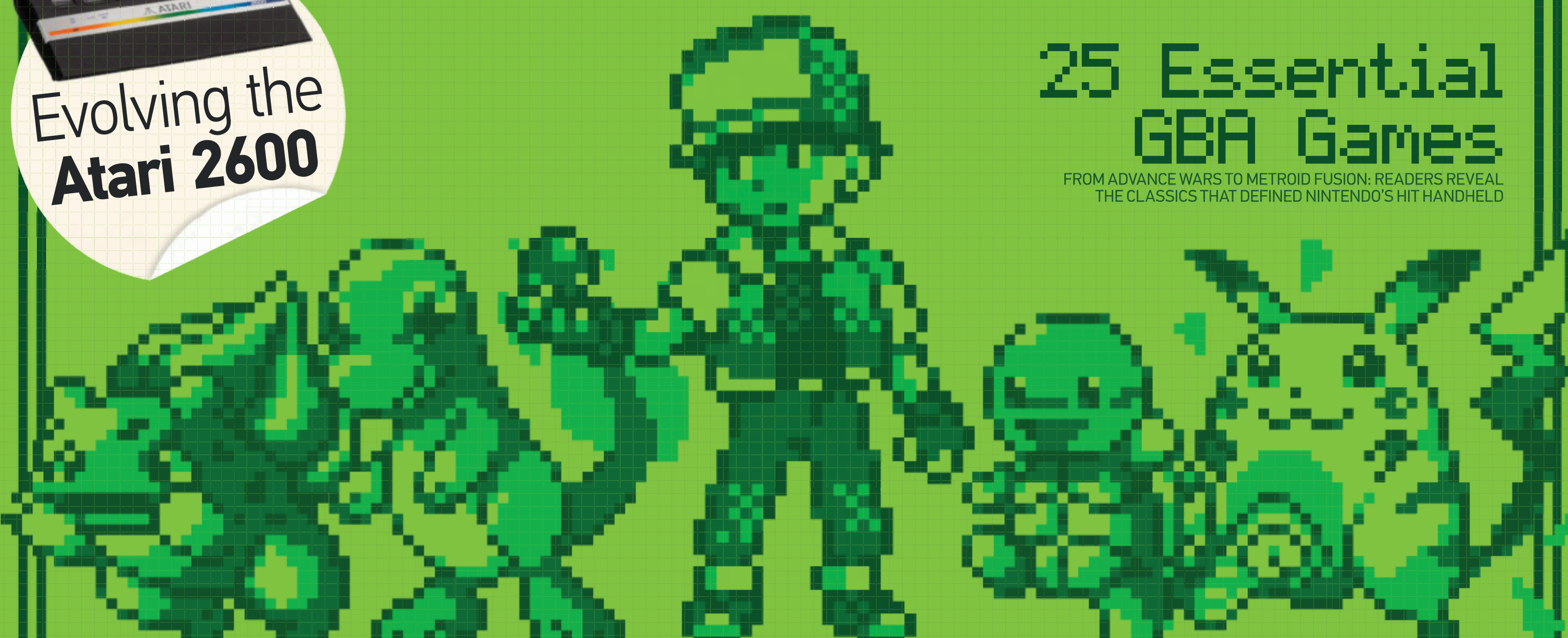
Junichi Masuda gives an exclusive interview. It's super effective!



Evolving the **Atari 2600**

25 Essential GBA Games

FROM ADVANCE WARS TO METROID FUSION: READERS REVEAL THE CLASSICS THAT DEFINED NINTENDO'S HIT HANDHELD



REVISITING DARIUS



YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO TAITO'S FISHY SHOOT-'EM-UP

SCULPTING CLAYFIGHTER



CREATING THE CLAY-BASED ALTERNATIVE TO STREET FIGHTER

ULTIMATE GUIDE: REZ

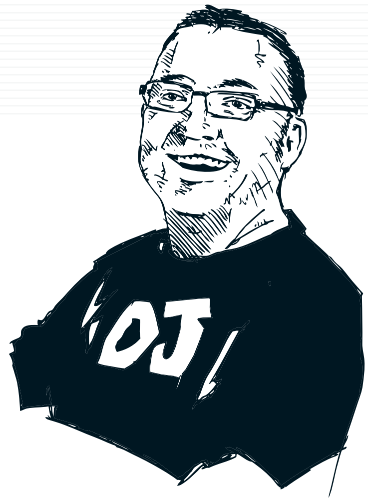


SEGA'S PSYCHEDELIC SHOOTER, FROM THE DREAMCAST TO PS VR

IMAGINE PUBLISHING
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GreatDigitalMags.com
ISSUE 161



SEGA
MEGA DRIVE
ULTIMATE PORTABLE GAME PLAYER
25th ANNIVERSARY SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
CLASSIC GAMING CONSOLE
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Includes Atari classics such as:
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THE RETROBATES FAVOURITE GBA GAME



DARRAN JONES

Easily *Metroid Fusion* for me, it's a truly stunning addition to the series that never gets the attention it deserves.

Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Until Dawn: Rush Of Blood

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



NICK THORPE

Did 2004 happen? The history books say yes, but all I can remember is *Advance Wars 2*.

Expertise:
Owning five Master Systems (I sold two)

Currently playing:
SoulCalibur

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



LUKE ALBIGÉS

Pokémon Emerald. Battle Frontier is still the best post-game content in any *Pokémon* game to this day.

Expertise:
Carrying Drew through *Destiny* Raids

Currently playing:
World Of Final Fantasy

Favourite game of all time:
Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament



DREW SLEEP

Pokémon Ruby. The Hype Train achieved trans-galactic speeds for this. I remember leaving my GBA SP in a theatre along with my copy of *Ruby*. I still tear up thinking about it…

Expertise:
Filling that SP-sized hole in my heart by buying a GBA Micro

Currently playing:
Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc

Favourite game of all time:
Rocket Knight Adventures



SAM RIBBITS

It's so hard to choose just one! But I'd probably have to go with *Pokémon Ruby*. Or *FireRed*. Actually, *Advance Wars 2*. Make that *Fire Emblem*. Oh, I forgot about *Metroid Fusion* too. Come back to me...

Expertise:
Not playing *Horace*. Ever

Currently playing:
Pokémon Yellow

Favourite game of all time:
Pokémon Yellow



PAUL DRURY

WarioWare Inc.. Those surreal little shards of gaming pleasure convinced me that five seconds really was the perfect length for a game...

Expertise:
Everiss' footwear

Currently playing:
Myriad

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



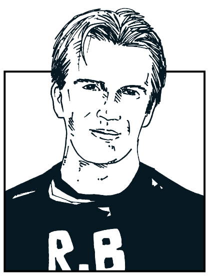
DAVID CROOKES

WarioWare Twisted! brought lots of great innovation to the handheld thanks to a gyro sensor in the cart.

Expertise:
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy and PlayStation (but is that retro? Debate!)

Currently playing:
Crash Team Racing

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



RICHARD BURTON

I've always had a soft spot for Rare's *Sabre Wulf*. The fun platform puzzler continues the adventures of Sabreman and is stuffed with references harking back to Ultimate's early games.

Expertise:
Time travel

Currently playing:
Manic Miner

Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner

LOADING...

It's not nice knowing that titles like *Pokémon* are 20 years old because it essentially means that you're old, and I don't like thinking I'm old. I *am* old, though, and it's important to remember that those youngsters who enjoyed *Pokémon* on its original release have all grown up as well (they're still far younger than me, mind).

Although I was much older than *Pokémon*'s target audience, I certainly didn't miss its impact in the UK. Originally released in 1996 in Japan, by the time it arrived in the UK, it was tied to a ridiculously popular cartoon, as well as one of the first collectible trading card games. It hit with all the power of a runaway train and my younger brother and cousins were all eager to jump on board.

While it's easy to dismiss *Pokémon* as a game for kids, it's anything but, and although I've not been a fan of some of the more recent *Pokémon* creations, there's no denying that there are still millions of gamers out there who do love Game Freak's imaginative RPG. So to pay homage to all those Pokéfans, we have Junichi Masuda explaining how it turned into one of Nintendo's biggest franchises.

But worry not, if you can't tell your Bulbasaurs from your Charmanders, you'll still find plenty of great content, including a look back at *Darius* and *Rez*, the story of Imagic and articles on *Mazogs*, *Saboteur 2* and the Atari 2600 Jr..

Enjoy the magazine!

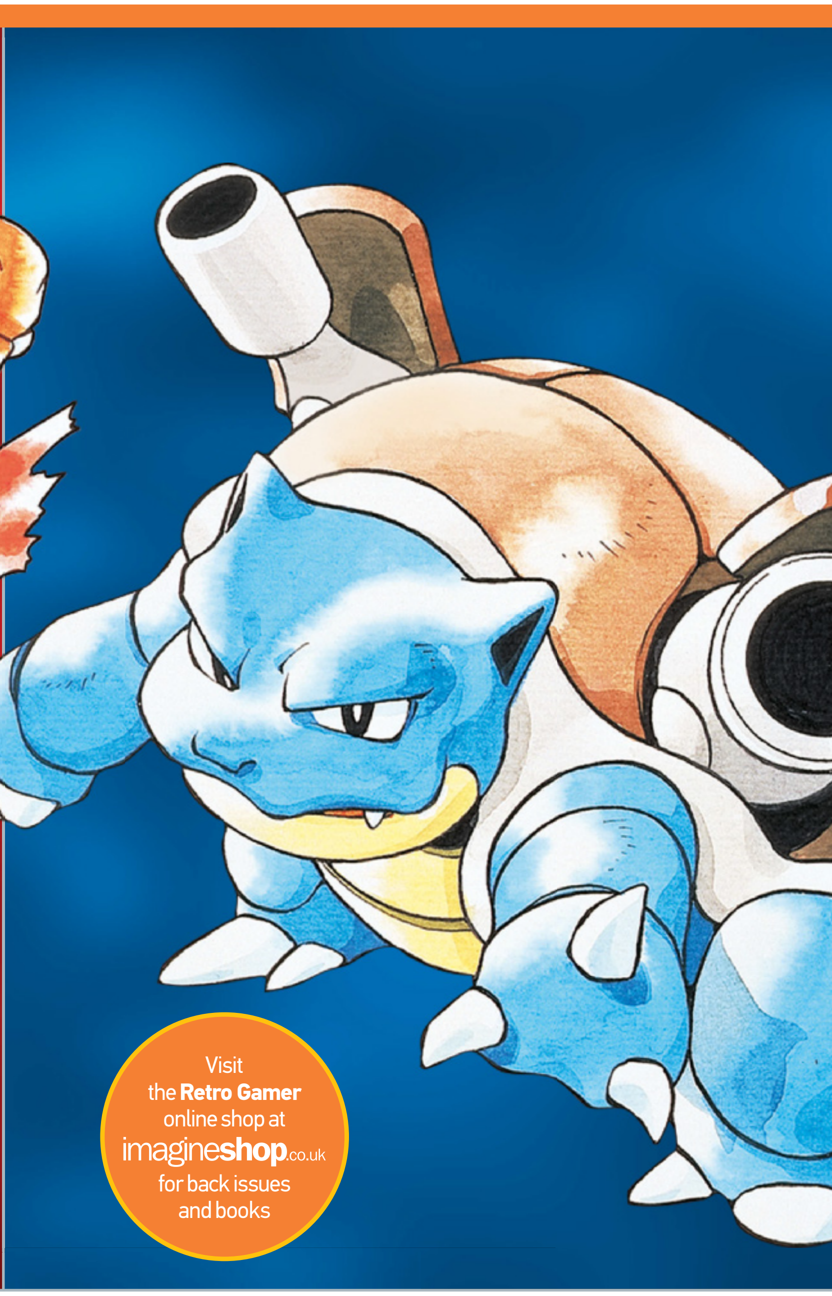




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>> Load 161 Breathing new life into classic games











"Advance Wars will keep your inner strategic general satisfied for ages"



REVIEWS





ESSENTIALS







Have your say!

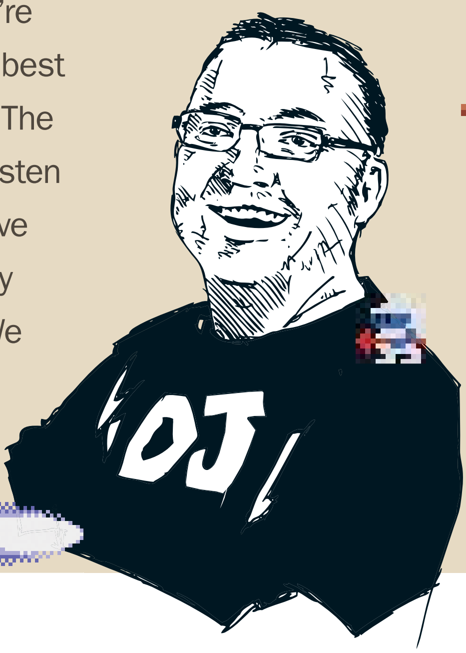
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Hi everybody. Here at **Retro Gamer**, we're amazingly passionate about making the best magazine possible for you every month. The easiest way to do that, of course, is to listen to what you want. With that in mind, we've put together a short, three-minute survey that will allow your voices to be heard. We look forward to your ideas.

Darran Jones
Editor





It's quick and easy to take the survey on any device

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Complete our survey & join the team today

retrogamer.net/survey2016

Four changes you asked for in 2015…

Last year we used your input to make some fantastic improvements, including…

1 Reader Interaction
We know our readers love to be involved, so we've made sure that's the case, both online and via social media services



2 Better Access
We've thrown the retro net out wide to catch many new developers that have never been interviewed in the magazine before

3 Balanced coverage
It's clear that our readers love all eras of retro, from the Spectrum to the PS2, so we've tweaked our features accordingly



4 Great Features
We've improved our cover features to ensure that they cover every aspect of the featured game, no matter how obscure

retroradar

GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



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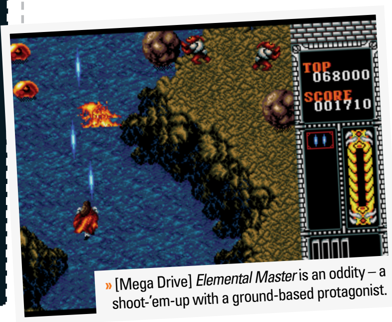
A THUNDEROUS RETURN

Sega buys Technosoft back catalogue

Sega has recently announced its acquisition of the copyright for all former Technosoft games, and has indicated that it is looking at the best way to take advantage of its new properties, most prominently the *Thunder Force* series.

Up until this year, the rights to Technosoft's games had been held by Twenty One Company, a Japanese pachinko manufacturer which bought Technosoft outright in 2001. The company had been struggling for some years prior to being bought – its last original release was a PlayStation visual novel back in 1998, and no new games were produced following the buyout. Parts of the Technosoft back catalogue had been made available on the PlayStation Network under Twenty One's stewardship, including the likes of *Thunder Force V*, but older games were typically left dormant. Other than that, the company had been producing soundtrack compilations on CD and download services such as iTunes.

In the short term, the likely benefit to consumers is improved access to some classic Mega Drive games. The company was arguably at its peak on Sega's 16-bit console, delivering a pioneering real-time strategy game in *Herzog Zwei*, the highly regarded top-down shoot-'em-up *Elemental Master* and the second, third and fourth *Thunder Force* games. Sega now has no obstacle to overcome in including these games as part of compilations and releasing



» [Mega Drive] *Elemental Master* is an oddity – a shoot-'em-up with a ground-based protagonist.

FROM THE FORUM

Retro Gamer readers offer ideas on how to best use Technosoft's work

Let's hope they do more with it than Konami has done with Hudson Soft. Well if Sega is already rereleasing Technosoft's *Thunder Force 3*, that's one more thing than what Konami has done.
DPrinny

Just make a Technosoft compilation disc, Sega. That would be more then plenty.
ALK

Thunder Force III on ALL THE FORMATS (please).
the_hawk

Rereleases would definitely be a nice start. Wouldn't mind giving some *Thunder Force* a go. As long as they do *something* which I'm assuming they *will* since there's no other reason to buy the back catalogue otherwise.
Megamixer

A Technosoft collection for the Xbox One would be amazing, I would buy that in a heartbeat.
The Laird

It's a good fit. Sega and *Thunder Force* will always be linked for me. Hope Sega doesn't let it go the same route as other companies have done with the likes of Taito. It's a shame that those companies and IPs have been forgotten.
RodimusPrime



» [Saturn] Games like *Nekketsu Oyako* are solid enough, but unlikely to make it to the West.



» [Saturn] A digital version of *Hyper Duel* would be a boon to everyone that can't afford the original.

"The only Technosoft series to have seen a new release in recent years is Thunder Force"

them on download services. One game which is unlikely to be included due to further complications is the pinball game *Dragon's Fury* (also known as *Devil Crash MD*), as its original copyright was a multi-party deal between Naxat Soft, Red Company and Technosoft.

The first example of this will come on the latest Sega compilation in Japan, *Sega 3D Classics Collection 3: Final Stage* for the Nintendo 3DS. At the same time as the acquisition of the Technosoft back catalogue was announced, Sega revealed that *Thunder Force III* has been added to the collection, bolstering an impressive line-up that also includes *Turbo Out Run*, *Gunstar Heroes*, *Streets Of Rage II* and *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*.

In the longer term, there's potential for some intriguing rereleases. There will definitely be an audience for the shoot-'em-ups *Hyper Duel* and *Blast Wind*, but whether or not Sega will make the effort to convert the games is another matter – they're both on the Saturn, which is a notoriously awkward machine to port from and to emulate. If they can be successfully converted, the two games will become vastly more accessible than they currently are, as original copies of both games will likely set you back several hundred pounds.

Other parts of the library are likely to remain dormant, or at the very least confined to Japan. PlayStation RPGs *Omise De Tensyu*, *Neorude* and *Neorude 2* have no name value and would require a hefty translation effort. The third-person action games *Hyper Reverthion* and *Kotetsu Reiki: Steeldom* don't hold up tremendously well today, and the likes of *Kuttu Ketto* and the gardening sim *My Garden* are just too far outside the norm. Then there's a wealth of 8-bit computer games, primarily on the MSX, which won't hold much nostalgic value to audiences in regions where the format didn't take off.

Sequels are also a possibility, but not particularly likely. The only Technosoft series to have seen a new release in recent years is *Thunder Force*, with the Japan-only PlayStation 2 game *Thunder Force VI* being released in 2008. Coincidentally this was also developed and published by Sega under a licence from Twenty One, under the leadership of Segagaga and *Astro Boy: Omega Factor* director Tetsu Okano. Whether or not the company is keen to revisit this series is currently unknown. Almost every other Technosoft property has spent a couple of decades in a dormant state, and would require brand-new assets for a modern release.

Another possibility is that Sega will simply issues licences for the former Technosoft intellectual property to external developers, a practice that it has been indulging in more frequently as of late. The company has retained the rights to *Wonder Boy*, but three remakes are currently in the works: *Wonder Boy Returns* from Korean developer CFK, and *Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap* which is being developed by Lizardcube and published by DotEmu. Likewise, the company still owns *Shenmue* and has only licensed the rights to Yu Suzuki's company Ys Net, which is currently developing *Shenmue III*.

While the future is uncertain, the new 3D edition of *Thunder Force III* gives the impression that Sega is more willing to proactively use these properties than Twenty One had been – and that can only be a good thing for players around the world. *

ASSIMILATION ARCHIVE

Sega has acquired quite a few properties over the years…



TOTAL WAR

When Sega acquired The Creative Assembly in 2005, it also snapped up the rights to its hit real-time strategy series that had previously been under Activision's publishing umbrella. The series has been considered to be one of Sega's key Western properties in recent years, with sustained strong sales.

PUYO PUYO

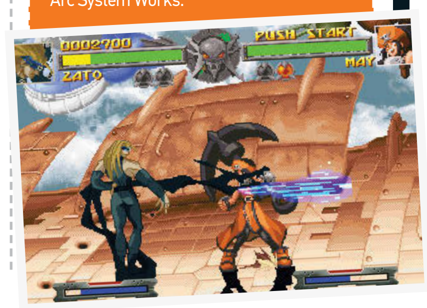
Sega first demonstrated an interest in *Puyo Puyo* back in the early Nineties when it rebranded the game as *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine*, but didn't own it until Compile sold the rights in 1998. The series has been under the care of Sonic Team for over a decade now.

COLUMNS

When Sega needed a puzzle game to compete with *Tetris*, it bought the rights to Jay Geertsen's colour-matching hit. The game was adopted as the first pack-in title for the Game Gear, and would later become a staple of both contemporary compilations (*Mega Games*, etc.) and retro compilations.

GUILTY GEAR

Consider this the one that got away. When Sega and Sammy merged in 2004, the majority of Sammy's videogame assets were put under Sega's control, including the *Guilty Gear* series. However, Sega relinquished control of the series in 2011 when it sold the rights to series developer Arc System Works.



WASTELAND 3 ON ITS WAY

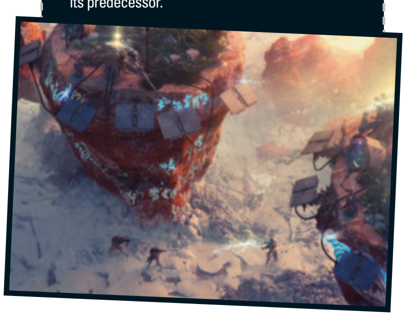
The third game in the franchise smashes its Fig target

Brian Fargo recently used Fig to announce the third part of the *Wasteland* series and it's already smashed its asking goal. InXile Entertainment was looking for $2.75 million in funding and reached that in just three days. *Wasteland 3* was currently on $2,975,222 as we went to press, and shows no sign of slowing down. Due to being on Fig, it's also allows the opportunity for fans to invest, although they'll need deep pockets as the pledge for investment starts at $1,000.

Kicked off by a comedic video that sees Brain Fargo travelling America in search for all of *Wasteland 2*'s key staff, we'd argue that the main reason inXile's campaign has been a success is because the company has proven form. Even though *Torment: Tides Of Numenera* is still in development *Wasteland 2* proved that the team could not only hit its goals, but deliver the game its fans wanted. Needless to say, we'll be covering the final game in a later issue.



» [PC] InXile Entertainment promises that *Wasteland 3* will be a big improvement over its predecessor.





WONDERS NEVER CEASE

THERE'S YET ANOTHER WONDER BOY GAME ON THE WAY

Typical, you wait absolute ages for a new *Wonder Boy* game then three come along at once. We'd have been happy enough with just the thought of a HD remake of *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* and the excellent-looking homage *Monster Boy*, but now another contender is entering the fray.

Created by CFK, *Wonder Boy Returns* will be a new HD retread of the original arcade classic and is due out on PC later in the year. "At CFK, [our] goal is to keep the classic gameplay and feel, but greatly improve the visual aspect," begins the recent press release, going on to reveal that we're not just getting a high-definition port of the original game… "While keeping the classic gameplay feel, [we] have added more colourful and appealing graphics fitting to modern era, and added additional elements to the game itself. To fit more to current trend, all characters including the hero, the heroine Tina, and various monsters had been redesigned from scratch. Under supervision of the original creator, this remake has added new stages and monster to amplify the fun aspect of the original game."

While we're pleased that the original game is getting a fresh airing, we're a little concerned with the graphical direction that CFK's game is taking. We feel the term ugly is a little harsh, but there's no denying that the new style doesn't quite have the same cartoonish appeal as the original 1983 classic. Of course, it's early days at the moment and we only have a trailer to go on, but if CFK can recapture the feel of the original arcade game it's certainly going to be worth revisting. Expect a review in a later issue.



» [PC] Let's just say the art style is 'interesting'…

MINTER GOES VR

URBAN LEGEND, POLYBIUS BECOMES A VR REALITY

As we were going to press, Jeff Minter revealed via an amusing blog post that he's working on a brand-new game for PlayStation VR inspired by urban legend, *Polybius*.

Rumoured to be a game that caused seizures and other ailments in those that played it, the stories about *Polybius* have been circulating for decades. Jeff's entertaining post alludes to playing the game once and losing his memory of it as a result. As his flashbacks become more vivid, he realised that VR was the perfect place to recreate those fleeting memories, and he's been working on his own homage ever since.

Gamers experienced *Polybius* at the recent Play Expo event and feedback has been very exciting – everyone seems to have retained their memory. We'll hopefully have more on Jeff's mind-bending new game next month.



retro radar column



Here's my bio… Paul Davies

In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.

Me: Version 14.02.69

I've just had another massive games clear out, and I need somebody to talk to about it. Luckily, I have you. Have you got five minutes? This might get philosophical, but let's see.

Although this one-way conversation will cover important issues such as pristine boxes and the associated memories, it's more about what we can realistically hold onto as old gamers. If you're not old (north of 45 by my estimation), good for you. This may still apply, however.

What are we holding onto exactly, with retro games? I think I know, and I think it's the same thing for all of us. A few issues back I went on about treasuring my memories more than the need to continue ownership. I touched upon these memories being circumstantial, but not realising that they were also selective. Let's say that most days of the week for the past 30-odd years I've spared a thought for some computer game or another. These were time and place things, put into my head by stuff I'd played in arcades, read about or chanced to own.

When all this started, videogames I mean, hardly any of us got to take the experience home. The experience was standing in front of a gigantic cabinet, searching your pocket for a 10p. So a big part of my crazy trajectory from this point involved wanting to have this at home, in as big a way as possible. Some retro enthusiasts make an effort to build an arcade at home. It's something I've considered too, but never had the space. Respect to all those that do.

So, for me, what I realised while dusting off some more collector's editions and old issues of magazines with a particular article that meant something at the time, etc. was that I had so much invested into games during my life, that this actually was most of my life: preserved in plastic bags, sandwiched between utility bills, bank statements and letters from Specsavers.

During this same period of time that I was clearing out, my son has started primary school. Obviously this brings back memories, but the big one for me is watching him, after only a few days, fall in with his classmates and just play around and not want to leave because he was having so much fun. And I've realised that all these things that I have kept to preserve a part of my life is because I value this one thing so much, that we genuinely do enjoy playing together, regardless of background. And with videogames in particular, a lot of the thrill of sharing is encountering something wondrous and intimidating then conquering it together.

I recognise this as 15-year-old me watching a kid playing *Pac-Man*, curious to see how far they get. Or being awestruck at *Virtua Fighter 4* and VF.NET, uniting Japan's best players. I've been loading up the physical space around me with paraphernalia to celebrate this space inside that all gamers share: a common fascination, forming a friendship, usually leading to trust that can lead to incredible teamwork. Even when we're being competitive, hoping to beat other players, it's the same connection. And that's what makes **Retro Gamer** so important. *



What do you think?

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk | www.retrogamer.net/forum


apex


NU-GEN
NU-GEN




EVO
STREET FIGHTER II
The World Warrior

the vault

THE COOL RETRO STUFF THAT WE'VE HAD OUR EYE ON THIS MONTH

8-Bit Art Book

This dual English/German release concentrates on the artistry of early videogame graphics, featuring a number of iconic games from the era of 8-bit platforms. There's some really lovely layout work inside, and fans of Eighties arcade and console games should feel right at home – however, the home computer representation is rather slight. It's definitely a great coffee table book, though.

Price: £29.99 **From:** funstockretro.co.uk

Hey Hey 16K

Remember MJ Hibbet's song *Hey Hey 16K*, which blew up online back in 2004? The same man has now done a two-man musical version, chronicling his trip back in time to see his teenage self (played by his friend Steve). The DVD includes the full performance, as well as extras such as backstage footage and the original *Hey Hey 16K* video.

Price: £12 **From:** gofasterstripe.com

Ultimate Nintendo: Guide To The NES Library 1985-1995

If you're familiar with online gaming personalities, you've probably come across Pat Contri (aka Pat The NES Punk) before. This hefty 450-page hardback book is his guide to all of the console's many hundreds of games. The full-colour book also contains plenty of screenshots, a look at the system's accessories and essays from the likes of Frank Cifaldi and James Rolfe (the Angry Video Game Nerd).

Price: $59.99 **From:** thepunkeffect.com



PICK OF THE MONTH

Turbo Everdrive

The Mega Drive and SNES are both well served with aftermarket peripherals and accessories, but the PC Engine/Turbografx line doesn't get quite as much love. Thankfully, the Ukrainian flash cartridge developer Krikzz isn't one to ignore NEC's cute little console, and the Turbo Everdrive is a bit of a marvel as it fulfils the functions of a few different devices.

The device is essentially a nice thick circuit board which slots into your console where a regular HuCard/TurboChip game would go, and has its own slot for a microSD card up to 32GB in size. It can then run homebrew games, backup copies of your own games, translation patched games and more. It'll also work on both PC Engine and Turbografx systems thanks to a small switch on the board, thus negating the need for a rare import adapter. If you're in a real pinch, it'll even substitute for the CD-ROM System Card and Super System Card (but not the Arcade Card).

Price: £64.99 **From:** retrotowers.co.uk

Mega Drive Wireless Console: Sonic 25th Anniversary Edition

AtGames' licensed plug-and-play console is back in a new edition, with a refreshed line-up of 80 built-in games. The unit features 39 games including new additions *Eternal Champions*, *Sonic 3D*, *Phantasy Star II*, *Phantasy Star III* and *Sword Of Vermillion*, and accepts original cartridges too – however, emulation inconsistencies mean that it won't be 100 per cent accurate to an original Mega Drive.

Price: £49.99 **From:** funstockretro.co.uk

collector's corner



JEWEL IN THE CROWN

DEFENDER OF OASIS
■ "This was my very first RPG, for the Game Gear. I had to sell it as a kid, but now I own two copies of it and I won't sell either."
PAID: £120

HAMMERIN' HARRY
"I asked a friend to get it for me and he almost got robbed by junkies."
PAID: £5

PANZER DRAGOON SAGA
"I paid a tenner after a two-hour ride to Devizes after a 12-hour shift in a very busy district hospital, in Southampton. I was knackered in the end, but it was well worth it."
PAID: £10

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
"Before collecting I already had a thing for picking up genre-defining games."
PAID: £20



BIO

NAME: Louie Pacheco

JOB: Healthcare assistant/ admin support in the London Independent Hospital

ESTIMATED VALUE: £90,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM: Mega Drive

FAVOURITE GAME: *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*

Collector's corner

Readers take us through the retro keyhole

If there's one thing collectors know all too well, it's that having a great collection is pointless if you don't have anywhere to store it. Louie Pacheco knows this, and came up with a clever solution – he keeps it overseas. "When I started to collect seriously I bought a bit of everything for every console and PC and I ended up with more than £6,000 of physical games and only a small bedroom to display them all," he tells us. "Since I live in the UK and I can't keep my collection with me, I've decided to transform my bedroom in Portugal into my own museum, so I removed the bed and added some shelves." It's an elegant solution and a somewhat nostalgic one too, as that bedroom is where his original games were first stored…

"I started collecting when I was a child," Louie tells us. "My father used to buy Mega Drive games for me and after beating them I used to trade two old ones for a newer one in a place called Feira da Ladra (our most famous Portuguese car boot in Lisbon). I was happy getting a new game, but sad parting with two, so I started to keep them and raise my money to buy them myself instead of trading them in."

Louie's collecting began to grow in size, but it was when he started to go for full PAL collections of the Mega Drive, Saturn and PlayStation, that his collection really ramped up. It then began to grow at an even larger rate once he moved to the UK. "In 2013 I moved to the UK and I noticed that I could get five to ten good games for the same price of one in Portugal. It is amazing how easy it is to collect here."

Louie is still sourcing games for his collection, but he refuses to pay extortionate prices, hoping that he will strike lucky. "Since retro collecting is getting so expensive, I only buy what I can find at car boot sales." He admits, though that it's getting far harder than it was. "I am very lucky if I find a Mega Drive or SNES game I don't own, and even cheap sports games are very hard to come around." He's happy with how things have turned out, though, and has accumulated around 80 per cent of the titles he wants. He leaves us with the following advice for those wanting to start their own collections: "Start buying the games you had as a child and you had to part with, and then buy all the games you really want to play." ✱



POPEYE GAME & WATCH
"My very first Game & Watch of one of my favourite characters."
PAID: £5



Bespoke Arcades

Cofounder Ben Georget discusses his high-quality arcade cabinets



» A look at a couple of cabinets being prepared in the Bespoke Arcades workshop.



When and why was Bespoke Arcades set up?
We started Bespoke Arcades 11 years ago, and, like most great retro endeavours, our very first prototype cabinet was built in a spare bedroom by cofounder Phil and myself. We realised that nobody was replicating the true arcade scene with authenticity and we wanted to bring high-quality arcade gaming to the masses. We never looked back and are proud to be a British company leading the field in what we do.

What do you think of the current resurgence in retro?
Seeing mature gamers rediscover forgotten classics after decades away is always heartwarming but it's even better when we see the younger generation being introduced to these games for the very first time. It's true that interest in retro gaming has never been higher, and it encourages us to push our hardware and creative technology further, enabling users to get more out of their arcade machines and making it easier to find that hidden gem you thought was gone forever.

What do you offer over similar companies?
Well, first of all, our machines exude quality. We don't do flatpack, we don't do 'build-your-own-kits', we don't do shoddy and we absolutely do not compromise. In terms of quality, we only settle for the very best and we like to think that we offer exceptional value for money for the level of product that we provide. Our arcades are hand built by specialist arcade engineers. Our cabinets are precision-cut and assembled/finished by hand for each customer right here in the UK by professional craftsmen. Each and every cabinet can be customised to the exact specification that suits the customers' needs, from lightguns and RGB buttons, through to secondary screens which display the original game artwork and instructions! The choice is endless and only limited by the imagination.

> **"Interest in retro has never been higher, and it encourages us to push our hardware"**
> Ben Georget

Are PC systems provided with all your cabinets?
Our arcade systems run off custom PC hardware, designed by our own engineers. We use custom PC builds which are thoroughly tested to comfortably handle even the most intense of arcade hits. Lesser companies use very low powered hardware and stock emulators meaning that games from the Seventies and early Eighties tend to run okay but any software released later than that is just a mess, a far cry from the 'real arcade' experience. We design our cabinets so that gamers never break the arcade illusion and very, very rarely notice the hardware, concentrating instead on the arcade experience to hand.

What type of people typically buy your cabinets?
Anyone who appreciates quality and wants the authentic arcade experience in their own home. If you think a Bespoke Arcade is only for the rich and famous, think again! Most of our customers are everyday gamers, yearning for a simpler time when gaming was instant and adrenaline-packed. Whilst our arcades may not be cheap, as most people understand, you get what you pay for in this world. Considering the cost of the build, the care that goes into each cabinet and the appreciation we give to all of our customers, we think it actually represents startling value for money. As more and more customers become aware of our premium quality however, we count ourselves lucky to sell our arcades to many famous faces from football, sports, music and even royalty. Customer discretion prevents us from naming most names, but suffice to say, many premier league players and rock stars are well acquainted with Bespoke Arcades. *



» [Arcade] Arcade games come from several classic compilations, including *Taito Legends*.



[Arcade] After a 10-year hiatus Strider Hiryu is back gracing the arcades once again.

BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM DECEMBER 1999

DECEMBER 1999 – Battlezone battles back, Sonic fits in your Pocket, Shenmue debuts on Dreamcast, Quake III makes the earth move, Donkey Kong 64 swings in and 18 Wheeler drives into arcades. Richard Burton spreads festive cheer…



New from Activision was *Battlezone II: Combat Commander* for PC. The second sequel to Atari's classic *Battlezone*, it blended real-time strategy and first-person shooter genres smoothly. While the first sequel from 1998 was attractive, yet underwhelming, this release refined the balancing act of level difficulty against playability, kept the variety of levels and quality of graphics consistently high while dipping in and out of the two genres.

Sonic returned, this time as a Neo-Geo Pocket Color-exclusive. Developed by SNK, *Sonic The Hedgehog Pocket Adventure* was beautifully constructed with familiar level designs. It played superbly with its crisp graphics racing along at a fair old lick.

Being only the second *Sonic* game released on a non-Sega games console (the first being the horrid *Sonic Jam* on the more-than-useless Game.com), you could be forgiven for thinking that it could be a rushed cash-in stinker of a title. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It was excellent in every aspect.

Another console exclusive was *Shenmue* by Sega for the Dreamcast, which sees you play as Ryo, looking to exact revenge on the man who killed his father. The open world 3D environment you explore is painstakingly designed and populated with interactive characters. *Shenmue* flirted with multiple genres but meshed them together to create a special game. RPG, action, life and social simulation and straight-up fighting are all touched upon. *Shenmue* was a revelation.

A host of great features, such as a day/night system, weather conditions, and convincing characters helped make *Shenmue* a very involving and compelling debut game for the series.

Despite being rich in gameplay, it didn't make Sega any money. At that time *Shenmue* was the most expensive videogame ever developed and it didn't get close to recouping that outlay. Despite being an outstanding and groundbreaking game, it was also a huge financial failure for Sega.

New from id Software was *Quake III Arena* for PC and Mac. The highly-regarded first-person shooter series took the unusual step of concentrating its efforts almost solely on the multi-player aspect. Although there was a single-player mode, it was against computer-controlled bots simulating a multiplayer game. Lovely graphics with beautifully complex texture mapping helped ensure *Quake III Arena* was another fragging hit.

In arcade land, Santa had emptied his diverse festive sack full of coin-op gaming with varying results. Sega unveiled its deluxe and imposingly-huge cabinet of *18 Wheeler: American Pro Trucker.* The aim of the game was to cross America in four stages starting in New York and finishing in San Francisco. You can choose from four big rigs, four drivers and at the start of each stage you get a choice of cargo to transport.

Gameplay is fairly standard with you racing against the clock to get to the end goal. While hitting traffic hinders you, it also damages your cargo and reduces its value. You also have to race against the Lizard Tail, a computer controlled trucker who rams and taunts you regularly. Finish a stage ahead of



[N64] Donkey Kong is back with his family in tow and they've got to save their island. A great game from Rare.



[PC] It was purely multiplayer focused, but that didn't stop *Quake III Arena* from being a huge success.



NEWS DECEMBER 1999

30 December saw former Beatle George Harrison and his wife attacked in their home. The assailant, Michael Abram, broke into their house and stabbed George Harrison 40 times with a knife. He suffered head injuries and a punctured lung before his wife, Olivia, rendered the attacker unconscious with a poker.

December wasn't filled with festive cheer as several famous musicians passed away. Jazz musician Charlie Byrd died on 2 December, fellow jazz/funk musician Grover Washington Jr. died on 17 December, Scatman John died on 3 December and Curtis Mayfield, the American singer/songwriter, passed away on 26 December. It wasn't a good month for music.

Two acting greats also died this month. Desmond Llewelyn who played the part of Q in 17 *James Bond* films, was killed in a car crash, aged 82, and Madeline Kahn, the American actress who starred in several Mel Brooks comedy movies alongside Gene Wilder, died of ovarian cancer, aged 57. December 1999 was not a good month for actors either.

Music album releases weren't as plentiful as previous months with the best of the bunch being *Born Again* (Notorious B.I.G.), *Everything Is Healing Nicely* (Frank Zappa), *Mimosa* (Fun Lovin' Criminals), *Kaleidoscope* (Kelis) and *Vol. 3: Life And Times Of S. Carter* (Jay-Z).

Cinema screens were busy with lots of seasonal releases. The best of the silver screen offerings included *Magnolia*, *Ride With The Devil*, The Hurricane, *Stuart Little*, *Galaxy Quest*, *Any Given Sunday*, *The Talented Mr Ripley* and *Man On The Moon*.



him and you get to play a nifty little parking minigame.

While *18 Wheeler* looked the part and played well it was ultimately a short-term racer. It was brilliant for a few credits play, but once the novelty of driving through a tornado had worn off repeated visits would be minimal.

For the want-to-be fisherman who doesn't want some smelly fish contaminating their personal space there was *Fisherman's Bait: Marlin Challenge* by Konami. The cabinet featured a controller shaped as a fishing rod, which made casting and bringing in your catch feel very authentic.

Capcom released *Strider 2*, a sequel to the coin-op original. The graphics had changed from 2D to pseudo-3D featuring 2D sprites placed over strikingly-designed 3D backgrounds. While the visuals were given a shot in the arm, the gameplay harked back to the original with the platform and fighting mechanics remaining largely unaltered. With three missions, plus additional unlockable content and bosses to defeat, there would be plenty for Strider Hiryu to contend with.

Away from the arcades, the N64 had two new games ready for Christmas. First up was *Donkey Kong 64* by Rare. The Kong family was back for a fourth iteration of the *Donkey Kong Country* series and they must save their island from the clutches of King K. Rool.

You can control five different characters in a *Mario 64*-esque 3D adventure. With eight levels, a world map and a swath of minigames, *Donkey Kong 64* would keep a lot of people very happy for a long time.

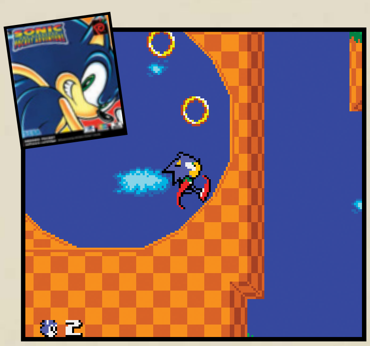
A developmental oversight led to a game-killing bug being overlooked with the only way to fix it to include an Expansion Pak supplying an extra 4MB of RAM. This would give more expansive levels and higher-quality graphics but was also the only way to stop the game randomly crashing. Every copy of *Donkey Kong 64* came with a free Expansion Pak at Rare's expense.

The Nintendo 64 present was *Road Rash 64* by THQ. While harking back to previous incarnations in gameplay terms, *Road Rash 64* featured graphics and textures that were kept to low resolution to cope with the action and racing.

While racing bikes and cracking your opponents in the face with a bat at 180mph was fun, the Mega Drive *Road Rash* games offered the same but executed better. *



[Dreamcast] There's good news and bad news. The good news is *Shenmue* is outstandingly good. The bad news is that Sega lost so much money over it.



[Neo-Geo Pocket] Sonic The Hedgehog makes just his second videogame appearance on a non-Sega console.

CHARTS

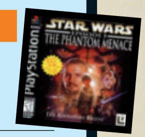
DECEMBER 1999

NINTENDO 64



1. Star Wars: Rogue Squadron (Nintendo)
2. Star Wars: Episode I Racer (Nintendo)
3. Ocarina Of Time (Nintendo)
4. F-1 Grand Prix II (Video System)
5. Quake II (Activision)

PLAYSTATION



1. Star Wars: Episode 1 - The Phantom Menace (LucasArts)
2. Driver (Acclaim)
3. Tony Hawk's Pro Skater (Activision)
4. South Park (Acclaim)
5. Soul Reaver (Eidos)

DREAMCAST



1. SoulCalibur (Namco)
2. Sonic Adventure (Sega)
3. Sega Worldwide Soccer 2000 (Sega)
4. Ready 2 Rumble (Midway)
5. House Of The Dead 2 (Sega)

MUSIC



1. The Millennium Prayer (Cliff Richard)
2. I Have A Dream / Seasons In The Sun (Westlife)
3. Re-Rewind – The Crowd Says Bo Selecta (Artful Dodger Ft. Craig David)
4. Back In My Life (Alice Deejay)
5. King Of My Castle (Wamdue Project)

THIS MONTH IN…

GAMESMASTER

The multiformat mag looked at Sony's forthcoming PS2 console. The team salivated over its power, the roster of games being lined up including *Tekken Tag*, *Street Fighter EX3* and *Gran Turismo 2000* and loved the DualShock 2 controller. However, it would be another year before Europe would see the console.



ARCADE

The team covered all the details of the Dreamcast launch party interviewing guests about their expectations and reaction to Sega's baby. Among the throng were Emily and Aleks, presenters of Channel 4's videogame show, *Bits*. *Arcade* also interviewed Nintendo legend Shigeru Miyamoto.



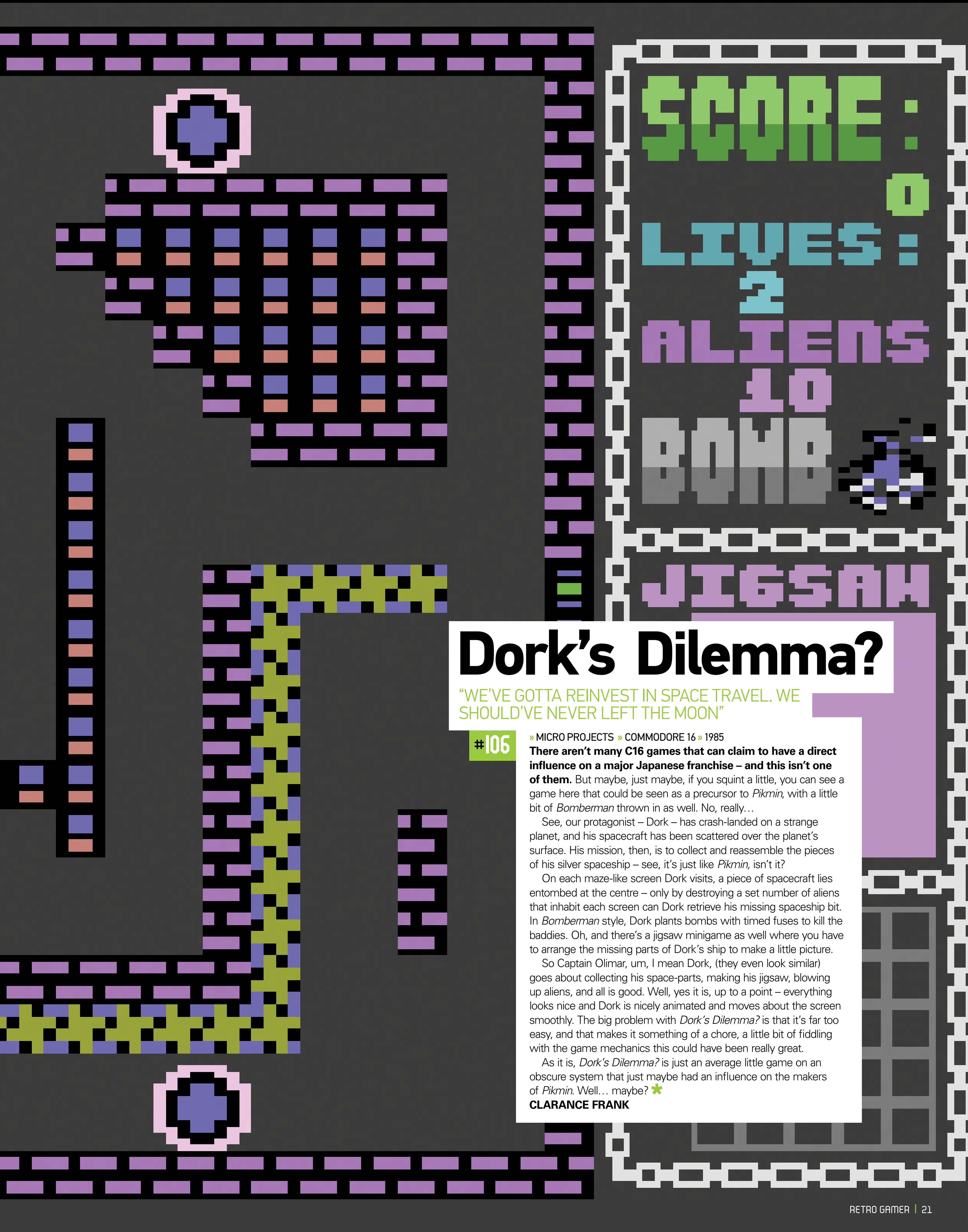
DREAMCAST MAGAZINE

A gathering of Dreamcast fans were given the chance to play *Crazy Taxi* prior to the Dreamcast conversion. As the arcade hardware for *Crazy Taxi* was essentially a Dreamcast in disguise, the port should've been pixel perfect. Luckily everyone loved the game.



retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL





Dork's Dilemma?

"WE'VE GOTTA REINVEST IN SPACE TRAVEL. WE SHOULD'VE NEVER LEFT THE MOON"

#106

» MICRO PROJECTS » COMMODORE 16 » 1985

There aren't many C16 games that can claim to have a direct influence on a major Japanese franchise – and this isn't one of them. But maybe, just maybe, if you squint a little, you can see a game here that could be seen as a precursor to *Pikmin*, with a little bit of *Bomberman* thrown in as well. No, really…

See, our protagonist – Dork – has crash-landed on a strange planet, and his spacecraft has been scattered over the planet's surface. His mission, then, is to collect and reassemble the pieces of his silver spaceship – see, it's just like *Pikmin*, isn't it?

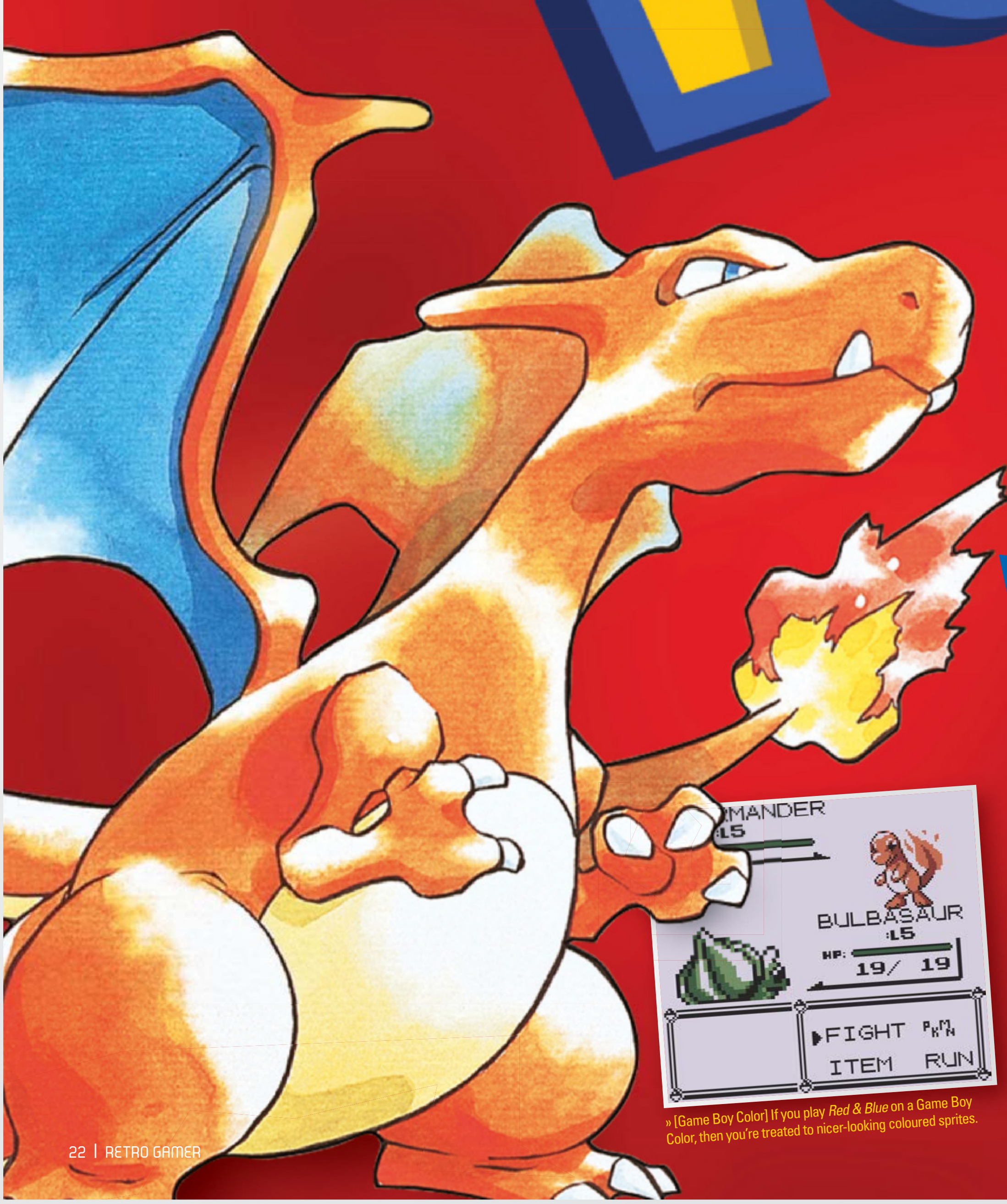
On each maze-like screen Dork visits, a piece of spacecraft lies entombed at the centre – only by destroying a set number of aliens that inhabit each screen can Dork retrieve his missing spaceship bit. In *Bomberman* style, Dork plants bombs with timed fuses to kill the baddies. Oh, and there's a jigsaw minigame as well where you have to arrange the missing parts of Dork's ship to make a little picture.

So Captain Olimar, um, I mean Dork, (they even look similar) goes about collecting his space-parts, making his jigsaw, blowing up aliens, and all is good. Well, yes it is, up to a point – everything looks nice and Dork is nicely animated and moves about the screen smoothly. The big problem with *Dork's Dilemma?* is that it's far too easy, and that makes it something of a chore, a little bit of fiddling with the game mechanics this could have been really great.

As it is, *Dork's Dilemma?* is just an average little game on an obscure system that just maybe had an influence on the makers of *Pikmin*. Well… maybe? *

CLARANCE FRANK





» [Game Boy Color] If you play *Red & Blue* on a Game Boy Color, then you're treated to nicer-looking coloured sprites.

Not just a gaming phenomenon but a multimedia one, Pokémon exploded in the late Nineties and is still going strong today. Luke Albigés grabs his Pokédex and sets out to document the hatching, training and evolution of the legendary franchise

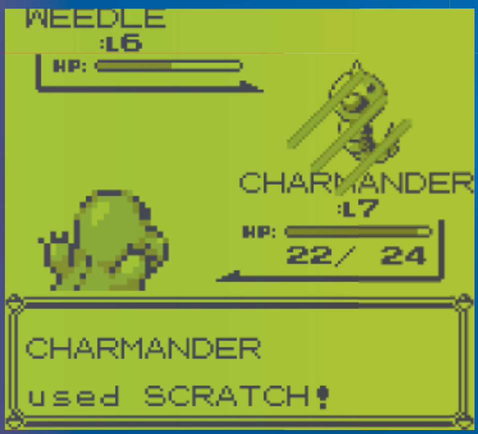
Well, do you? No need to play coy – *you know what we're talking about.* Do you want to be the very best? Like no one ever was? The thing about *Pokémon's* many elements is that they're all interconnected, and just seeing screenshots or the logo is often enough to send that opening G power chord ringing out in your head, to evoke visions of Ash turning his cap backwards in the anime or to remind you of that shiny Charizard card you just couldn't get for love nor money back in the day. *Pokémon* launched on a worldwide scale not just as a videogame but as a multimedia offensive. Supported by a TV show, merchandise and other products following the huge success of its original Japanese launch, there was just no way it could fail. It was *everywhere* and in the late Nineties, you could barely move without seeing Pikachu's beaming little face somewhere.

But while that might have been the start of the phenomenon as we know it, our story begins earlier. Well, a lot earlier – all the way back in 1990, in fact, or even *earlier* if you want to track the origins of the most



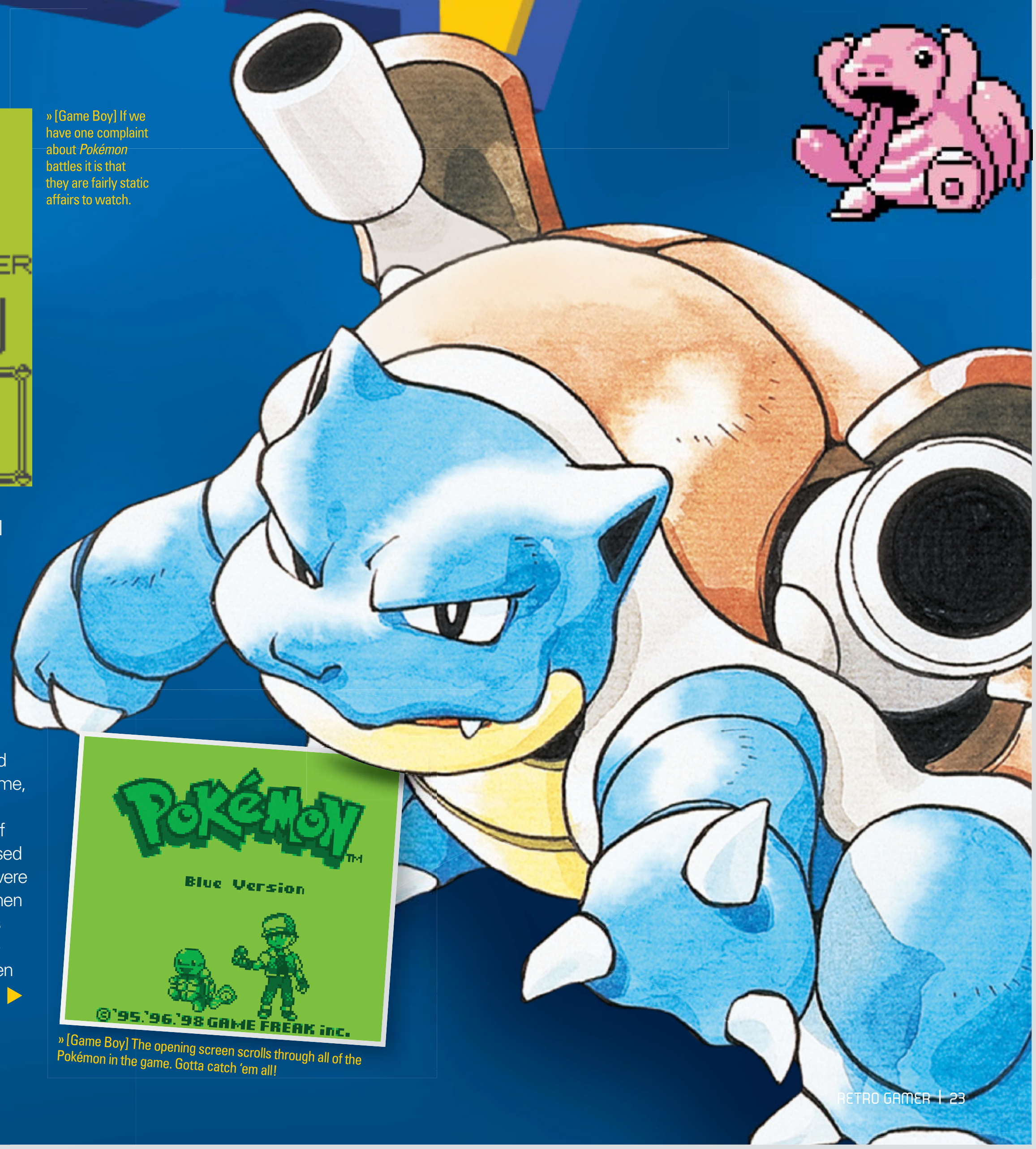






» [Game Boy] If we have one complaint about *Pokémon* battles it is that they are fairly static affairs to watch.

important people behind the franchise. "Mr [Satoshi] Tajiri was the founder of Game Freak and I was a friend of his when I was a student," recalls veteran Game Freak artist Ken Sugimori, the art director and character designer on pretty much all of the games and who has been responsible for official art assets. "We used to play videogames together and that's how we started this company – Mr Tajiri started a company and I joined. Back in 1983, Mr Tajiri started selling this little booklet for ¥200 and it was sold only in very specialist bookstores. It talked about strategies for arcade games because, at the time, there were no home consoles. A few people would visit these stores and see the book, and I was one of them. As we talked, we became friends and discussed how arcade games were often very similar – if we were developing them, what would we do differently? When we started, some of the readers were programmers and they had the skills and access to the hardware – that's how we started in producing videogames. Then Mr Masuda joined and our first game was *Quinty*."



» [Game Boy] The opening screen scrolls through all of the Pokémon in the game. Gotta catch 'em all!



Just The Start

"Who was your first Pokémon?" we asked, and this is what you said...



24%

Bulbasaur

We're surprised this leafy little dude didn't fare better, if we're honest – it can make short work of the first two Gyms and its unique split typing gave it a strong set of options in battle. It also evolves quickest of the three starters, reaching its blooming awesome final stage at Level 32 rather than Level 36, although its reliance on status moves may put off those who just want to bang their heads against opponents.



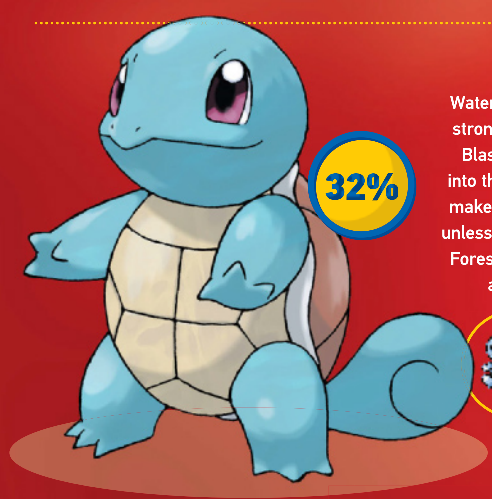


44%

Charmander

While we're not entirely surprised that He Who Would Be Charizard came out on top in our poll, picking the Fire type as your starter is actually the hardest option as it's weak to both Rock and Water, the types used by Brock and Misty in the first two Gyms. Still, with the highest attack power of the three, it's hard to argue that the Charmander line isn't a powerhouse once you overcome that first hurdle.





32%

Squirtle

Water types have something of a history of being strong defensive options in *Pokémon* games and Blastoise – Squirtle's final evolution – also fits into this category. As such, it's not always easy to make headway (plus you're likely to stall at Misty unless you've bagged yourself a Pikachu in Viridian Forest), but Squirtle's depiction in the anime was always going to make it a fan favourite.





▶ *Quinty*, or *Mendel Palace* as you might know it, was a simple action-puzzle game released for the NES in 1989, its completion heralding the start of something much bigger, much more ambitious in scale, something that we know today as *Pokémon*. The vision started out small, originally targeting a creature count of around 50 monsters but with that number growing steadily as new ideas were hatched and improved hardware and coding techniques emerged around them. In fact, it sounds as though the team always had more ideas than would be possible to fit into the memory capacity of a Game Boy cartridge. "From the inception of the idea to the completion of *Red & Blue* took a total of about six years, so a long time!" smiles current producer Junichi Masuda, whose involvement on earlier titles was mainly in coding and penning the music of the original games, later taking on directorial and production duties on every mainline release. "We started by creating loads of different Pokémon designs, then we reduced that down to the favourite 150. That took a lot of effort. After that, once we were happy with our designs, we started working on the moves they could each use. This process probably accounted for around three of those six years. It was quite the task! There wasn't an initial plan of which Pokémon would get which moves – we designed the Pokémon then designed the moves, then decided which would fit well together as a gradual process."

Masuda goes on to confirm our suspicions that the team was dreaming far bigger than what a cartridge could accommodate, but it wasn't just a question of storage – it was a case of the ideas being beyond the realms of what the Game Boy hardware could do. "It was difficult. The thing we wanted to focus on at the start was communication and trading but it was difficult to do that as we could only transfer small amounts of data between two consoles," he explains. "Communication itself was a big challenge – the technology just wasn't there but we really wanted to do it, so we fought to get it in there. That was an overriding theme – it was a fight against capacity, a fight against what we could fit onto the cartridge. We had designed these 150-odd Pokémon to get in as well. But then we had the problem of movement, so we came up with the idea of the map tiles being the things that moved while



» [Game Boy Color] Game Freak threw in nods to the real world as in-jokes, these Easter Eggs would persist throughout the series.

> **"The thing we wanted to focus on at the start was communication"**
> Junichi Masuda



» [Game Boy] Red is about to tackle one of the most difficult conundrums in all of gaming: which starter to pick?

the character was animated in place. With these ideas, we found ways to squeeze as much in as we possibly could. I like the Game Boy as a machine but trying to work with all these challenges and make a game that anyone could get into and enjoy was difficult."

Bear in mind that we're still talking about the original Japanese releases of *Red & Green* at this point – localisation hadn't even been considered, and the studio ran into some serious issues when tasked with preparing the game for release outside of Japan. "Originally, it was kind of based on how people feel about and view different colours. The clearest split for us was between red and green but when we started thinking about abroad, it was clear that wasn't the case. In America in particular, it's red and blue that are considered 'opposites', if you will," Masuda reveals, although there were somewhat more pressing issues standing in the way of taking the game abroad, which is what led to the gap of over two-and-a-half years between Japanese release and US launch, not to mention another year to reach Europe. "With the capacity problems mentioned earlier, one thing that we found is that English takes up more space on the cart than Japanese. We had no room! Everything was so full on that cartridge and there was little space to implement English at the time we created it. So we had a lot of memory problems to solve – things like changing Pokémon names and even the name entry screen, which was all designed in Japanese. To change that to accommodate English was really difficult and something we hadn't considered when first designing the game. We really had to spend a lot of time working on all of this." ▶

Like No One Ever Was

Pokémon theme singer Jason Paige on his contribution to the series' success

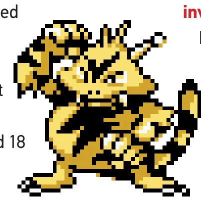


How did you come to land the gig performing the original *Pokémon* theme?
It was one of 100 sessions a year that I did for various clients. I had worked for this music house before and as always sang my face off for the demo session. Soon after, we recorded a few changes that eventually were approved for the show. Shortly after the success of the TV show, the album *2.B.A.Master* was recorded when the full version of the theme song appeared, along with *Viridian City*.

Was everything set in stone when you came to record it, or were you able to add any personal flourishes?
Every session involves a collaboration between singer and producers, writers and the client to find the best delivery. In the session, I sang multiple versions of the line 'gotta catch 'em all' with many melodies, giving them a variety of choices. I riffed out in the bridge and augmented some lines to amplify emotion. Though I didn't get credit as a writer, I believe everyone in the room is responsible for the product.

Were you aware of the brand at the time, or given any source material to get a feel for it?
I was aware of the brand through some news articles. And we had examples of the Japanese TV show to watch and catch the vibe.

Did you have any idea how huge *Pokémon* would become, and how iconic the theme would go on to be?
Every session is a roll of the dice hoping that the effort results in the most happiness for the most people. Often there are other indicators like celebrity involvement, big producers, writers, networks that promise to make a product big and it doesn't go anywhere. I've learned to be in the moment – serve the creative task at hand and move on to the next one. Water the seed and wait for the fruits to appear. And they're still coming off of these seeds planted 18 years ago.



Would you describe yourself of a fan of *Pokémon*? Do you play/enjoy the games, and indeed videogames in general?
I was an arcade kid playing all of the old-school games. *Space Invaders*, *Missile Command* Donkey *Kong*, *Q*bert*, *Night Driver*. And at home, I had Atari, Intellivision and Coleco games and now I am a *Pokémon Go* player and fan. It far surpasses my childhood arcade games. Its multiple choices and outcomes are way more exciting than the single path games of my youth. There are no right answers of how to be the very best. Each individual has a unique path to be that master. Just as each *Pokémon* has a unique path to its most evolved state.

How do you feel the theme sits among the rest of your portfolio?
It's right at home with the *Lego Mania* theme song that I wrote mid-Nineties and other popular jingles like the Pepto Bismol *Nausea Heartburn Indigestion* anthem. Subway's *Eat Fresh*, Mountain Dew's *Bohemian Rhapsody* and others are right in line with it. And with the addition of the new *Pokémon GO* theme song available at PokémonGotheme.com – the perfect companion for the next generation of players and *Pokémon* lovers. I also do magic and balloon sculpture so kids have many reasons to love me. *Pokémon* makes people happy and helps them expand their imaginations. I have a portfolio of work that seeks to enhance the imagination as well through sharing my unique truth and voice.

Finally, anything you'd like to add about your involvement with Pokémon?
I believe *Pokémon* to be a game that enables critical thinking as people are challenged to develop unique strategies to excel that they then can share with other players. These lessons easily transfer to their own lives. As new technologies like AR are integrated, the game and brand will adapt for even greater adventures. I can't wait to see what future technologies are added. And the updates should make it more exciting as well, adding more functionality and interactivity between players. It's all so incredible on a physical level as it demands movement not just through neighbourhoods but through entire regions. It's also made quite an impact on childrens' health, getting them out into the world, increasing learning for kids with autism and adding much social value surrounding its explosion.

Evolution Tracker

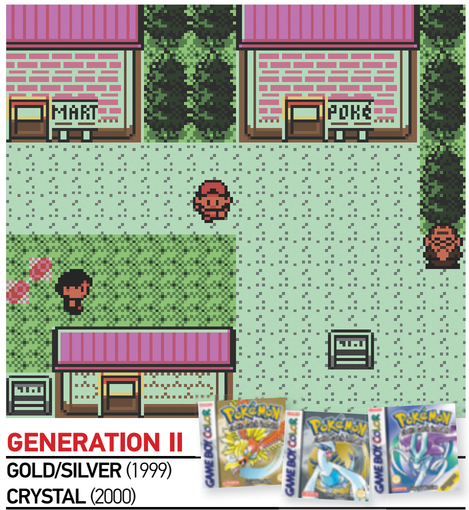
Each new game or generation in the Pokémon series has brought with it significant changes and improvements



GENERATION I

RED/GREEN/BLUE (1996)
YELLOW (1998)

■ *Pokémon* was released in Japan for the first time in 1996 and proved immensely popular. Despite the games' protracted development, there were still several major bugs and glitches, many of which are ironed out with a third *Blue* version arriving later in the year. This would also update visuals and audio, providing the basis for the international release as *Red & Blue* that rolled out between 1998 and 1999. Another revision, *Yellow*, emerged slightly later, the game modified a little to be more in line with the plot, events and style of the anime.



GENERATION II

GOLD/SILVER (1999)
CRYSTAL (2000)

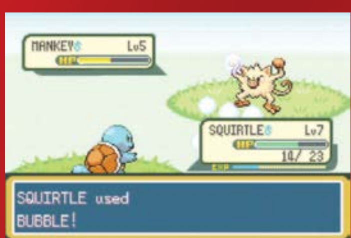
■ A lazy sequel would have been easy to do, but instead, Game Freak iterated on everything that made the first game stand out. Two new types were introduced – Dark and Steel – in an attempt to rebalance existing ones, while the shift to a real-time system that governed Pokémon and NPC availability was incredible. It also saw the debut of shiny Pokémon with variant colours, pre-evolutions of existing creatures, held items for use during battle, genders and breeding, as well as splitting the original Special stat into attack and defence values in line with physical stats.



GENERATION III

RUBY/SAPPHIRE (2002), **EMERALD** (2004)
FIRERED/LEAFGREEN (2004)

■ This gen brought in many staples of the modern *Pokémon* game – Abilities added passive traits to each Pokémon, Natures altered base stats and Double Battles allowed for two-on-two encounters, plus Contests gave a non-battle aspect for pacifists. It also saw a shake-up to the way each Pokémon's potential was calculated, marking the shift to the IV system still used to this day. *Emerald* put a real focus on post-game content with the excellent Battle Frontier, while *FireRed & LeafGreen* brought the original games up to date with these more complex new systems.



» [GBA] *Pokémon Red & Blue* received full remakes for the Game Boy Advance.



» [Game Boy] Pokémon Centers are a staple of the series, offering free medical care for all.

▶ Some of this could be seen in the game at the time, with character limits on menu terms, character, creature and item names and even a few attacks. Space, both on the screen and on the cart itself, was at a premium, hence these unusually short chunks of text, as seen elsewhere in the game actually, as Masuda highlights. "Another example is the Pokédex. In the original Japanese versions, you just had one screen and everything was displayed there whereas in the US and European versions, it had to be changed to have two screens with the names and details of the Pokémon. Doing all these great changes took a long time, so that was what contributed to the delay. We never expected things to be so popular abroad, either – we had no idea this would be such a phenomenon so that was really amazing. But yes, it took a long time to make all the changes needed to get the game into different markets."



After all this extra work, *Red & Blue* released in the US towards the end of 1998. With the anime, the trading card game and more toys games and other assorted tat with the *Pokémon* logo slapped on it releasing alongside it, the buzz was huge and with no European launch date so much as hinted at by Nintendo at the time, would-be Trainers would have to go out of their way to grab import copies of the game – some indie game stores even imported these in bulk to sell through at a premium. "Back at school, a friend of mine had brought back *Pokémon* from America, where he had gone on holiday," recalls Joe Merrick, webmaster of Pokémon fansite Serebii.net – a resource many like-minded Pokémaniacs have been using for well over a decade. "It hadn't been released here, though the anime was running on Sky and so when he showed the game, I was intrigued, watched the anime and pestered my mother to import the game."

Surrounded as it was by a hype machine on a peerless scale, you might think that this wasn't a matter of quality – for those who weren't fans, the choppy, low-budget animation of the TV show and hoards of cheap collectible junk certainly could have suggested as much, at least. Despite its seemingly low production values, the anime series was entertaining in its own way, luring in new fans with its colourful characters and easy-to-follow stories, but the games have always been superb. "I think the quality had to be there," muses Merrick. "Without it, people wouldn't have felt encouraged to play the game. While *Red & Blue* were a bit buggy, they had a solid foundation, and were complete fun to play causing a lot of people to jump in. However, the factor of the anime and cards also had a huge impact to the reach of *Pokémon*. Many people didn't play the games and just focused on the cartoon or the cards, but like the games, the quality definitely had to be there for it to take off."







GENERATION IV

DIAMOND/PEARL (2006), **PLATINUM** (2008)
HEARTGOLD/SOULSILVER (2009)

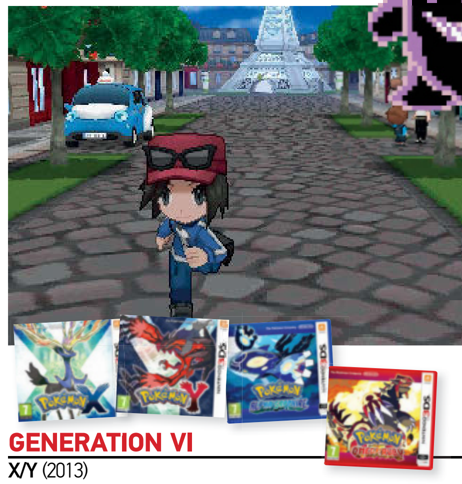
■ The major change ushered in by this generation was the physical/special split, where move power would be governed by the Attack or Special Attack stat on a case-by-case basis. The jump to DS hardware also allowed for other improvements, such as 3D environments and contextual use of the touchscreen, not to mention true online functionality for the first time. *Platinum* iterated upon this further, while remakes *HeartGold* and *SoulSilver* brought the second-generation games up to date with all the new features of the current mainline games.



GENERATION V

BLACK/WHITE (2010)
BLACK 2/WHITE 2 (2012)

■ Quality of life was order of the day here, and we're thankful for it today. Primary alterations included the removal of usage caps on TMs, a freeform Elite Four structure and not having to worry about the effects of status conditions such as Poison outside of battle, while new battle modes like Triple and Rotation Battles brought in even more new ways to play. Online play was also improved and Global Link for trade and battle really added to the package. It's the only generation where we've seen direct numbered sequels, too.





GENERATION VI

X/Y (2013)
ALPHA SAPPHIRE/OMEGA RUBY (2014)

■ Another leap to more powerful hardware meant another big set of changes, with the death of four-directional movement and the introduction of full 3D environments being chief among them. A new type – Fairy – was also added, the first since the second generation. Greater visibility on previously-hidden stats and values was another nice quality of life improvement, while Mega Evolution updated existing Pokémon with new, more powerful versions during battle, something that was taken further in the third-generation remakes that followed.

> **"It took a long time to make all the changes needed to get the game into different markets"**
> Junichi Masuda

But take off it sure as hell did, the multi-limbed approach meaning that there was always something going on in the world of *Pokémon* – game development may be time-consuming but when you've got new TV episodes dropping, trading card sets being released, toy lines coming out and Arceus-knows what else helping to fill the gaps between the mainline videogame releases, it's easy to maintain a high-profile media presence. "We do have various staff involved in different things and we always think about these when developing a game," confirms Masuda. "We really want to think about how we can develop beyond the game and widen things once it's finished. For the card game in particular, we've got Creatures Inc. working on the game itself and we discuss with them how best we can expand on the game there and how the new Pokémon we're creating might fit in with their plans." He goes on to explain the difficulty in such coordination between multiple teams and companies, especially when game release dates can't be easily altered. "As we develop the game, we get the TV, TCG and animation teams in to play it so that they have a better idea of what the world, the characters and the Pokémon are like," adds Sugimori. "We're all creating the characters and the settings together so that they're consistent across movies, games and trading cards."

As was to be expected, sequels to *Red & Blue* came thick and fast, but not before Game Freak could establish something that would go on to become almost traditional for *Pokémon* releases – a third game to complement the original pair of releases, originally in the form of *Yellow* (or *Special Pikachu Edition*, to give it its full title) which bridged the gaps between *Red & Blue* versions and was tweaked to tie into the events and characters of the anime. *Crystal*, *Emerald* and *Platinum* all filled similar roles in their respective generations, although it stopped there – *Black & White* didn't exactly lend themselves to the naming conventions of this trend (honestly, who would buy *Pokémon Grey*?) and got direct sequels instead, while X and *Y* were long rumoured to get the trilogy treatment with *Z*, although all the stuff that has emerged that follows legendary Pokémon Zygarde has instead found its way into the imminent seventh-generation releases, *Sun & Moon*.

Each game, while still rooted in the core structure used in *Red & Blue*, has made great strides in ▶

A New Dawn

A new Pokémon game is just on the horizon…

***Pokémon Sun & Moon*, coming this November, is looking to pay tribute to the original *Pokémon* games that started the entire phenomenon, but also add new innovations. The game is boldly doing away with Gyms – a staple of the series since the beginning – replacing them with puzzle-based Trials, and some of the original 150 Pokémon have been reimagined with new 'Alolan' forms. Vulpix, Dugtrio, Meowth and Raichu all have varients, with much more soon to be discovered in the brand-new region of Alola.**





Science Of Pokémon

Raising the perfect Pokémon – there are myriad factors at work under the hood and true masters will need to be on top of all of them



IVs

Short for Individual Values, these hidden stats dictate the potential of a Pokémon. While randomly generated on capture, these values are a lot easier to manipulate via breeding, with parent Pokémon passing on a set number of these values to its offspring, which can be increased by having one breeding partner hold the Destiny Knot item. Chain breeding, while time-consuming, can therefore lead to hatchlings with perfect stats.

Natures



While breeding for great IVs, you'll also want to make sure you end up with a Nature that is beneficial to the Pokémon in question without hurting its other stats too much. Alakazam, for instance, can happily roll with a Modest nature as boosting Special Attack in exchange for a cut to its already-awful Attack. A 10 per cent buff to a beneficial stat is huge and there's almost always another than can be sacrificed to get it, meaning the neutral Natures are rarely the way to go.



EVs

It's Effort Values this time, referring to the stat boosts granted by battling against different types of Pokémon. Every opponent defeated adds one or more points to a stat, with every four points granting a one-point boost to that stat at Level 100. This isn't infinite, mind – there's a cap at 510 points and 255 to any given stat, allowing for up to 63 points to be added to stats of your choosing or a broader spread of smaller boosts.

Moves



While you might think attacks will be the last thing to think about, that's not always the case. Certain moves can only be learned via breeding – and in some cases complex strings of chain-breeding across multiple species – which can add yet another variable into the mix. For the most part, TMs and tutors can be used to supplement 'natural' moves and get the perfect results, but there will be some instances where breeding for Egg Moves is the only way to get the attacks you want.



Abilities

With each Pokémon having between one and three passive Abilities, getting the right one is important, if not crucial depending on the creature in question. In some case the difference is negligible or there is only one option in the first place, and that makes life a little easier. But for others, the optimal Ability is the difference between competitive viability and storage-box-filler.

Held Items



Nearly there now. One last thing to consider is which item each Pokémon on your team should hold. These will often tie into existing strengths and game plans, although many of the outliers also serve as viable options on the right Pokémon – switch in a Rocky Helmet Ferrothorn against a Mega Kangaskhan and you'll see what we mean. Choice items, ironically, lock you into only the first move used while offering a bonus to Attack, Special Attack or Speed but this requires a moveset tailored around it.



Team Balance

You'll need more than one great Pokémon if you *really* want to be the best, and synergy is important. You need to ensure that as many weaknesses are covered as possible, all major threats are checked with a counter and support Pokémon are on-hand to give a helping hand. Aim to pack one defensive and offensive Pokémon for special and physical attacks, leaving you two spots on the team to cover weakness and support.

> **"If you added like 300 or so new monsters, that'd just be too many"**
> Ken Sugimori

terms of improving quality of life for players, which can make it hard to go back to those older games after being spoiled by so many minor improvements in more recent ones. "I look back on them fondly, for sure, but replaying them is a tricky proposition," Merrick tells us in discussion of returning to the original games today. "So often when I go back to play them, so many of the modern conveniences in it are just not there and make playing a slog. For example, in *Pokémon Red*, *Blue* and *Yellow*, you had no idea what a move did in-game unless you had an external guide. Sometimes playing the old games without the conveniences and features of modern games just causes me to think, 'How did we play these games?' Once I erase that from my mind, though, I can still enjoy and play through them happily."

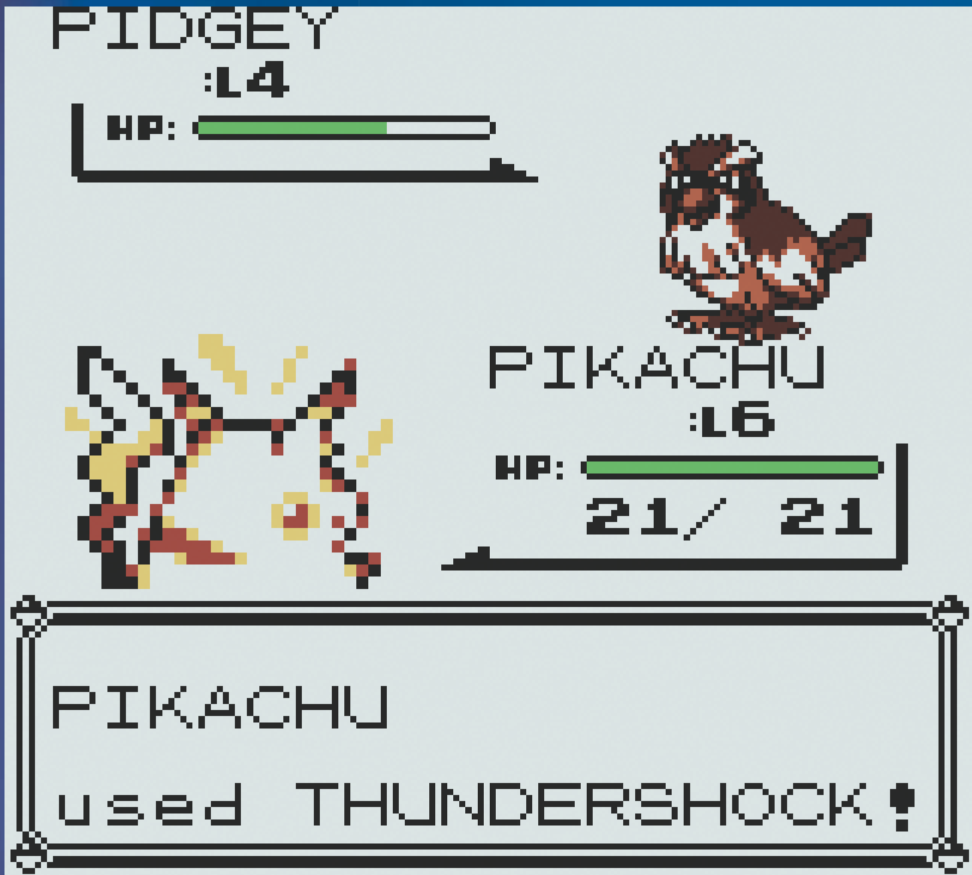
Even then, it's not just these minor convenience tweaks, with each new generation expanding the strategic aspect of the game, not least with every new generation bringing with it a whole new selection of *Pokémon*. "The reason why there are about 100 Pokémon added per game is not that we can't come up with the ideas, especially when we have new staff – everyone can come up with unique ideas," Sugimori explains. "The number is set by the duration of the project. Plus, if you added like 300 or so new monsters, that'd just be too many – we have to think of the balance of battles." The same is true of introducing new types into the mix, which is why only three new ones have been added to the initial 15 since launch. "By adding even one more type, it definitely makes the gameplay more complicated so when we did that, we had to really look into the battle balance," Sugimori tells us. "With new moves, there's an infinite combination. If we can solve that problem, we can always add more types – it's not impossible."

Having been on board since the very beginning and been more attached to the series than most thanks to



» [Game Boy] We all named our rival stupid names, right? Here our character takes on the dreaded Doobrie.

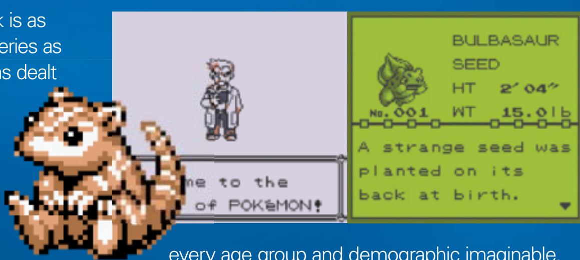




» [Game Boy Color] Sprites were redrawn for the *Yellow* edition of the game, in order to bring the designs in line with the anime and artwork.

his ongoing hard work with Serebii.net, Merrick is as well-placed to discuss the significance of the series as anyone else you might care to mention – he has dealt with the franchise in all its guises on a pretty much daily basis, with a weekly workload that is pretty staggering for a fan project. "Sometimes it's as little as five hours, others it is pretty much 155 hours," he laughs. "It all depends on what is going on in the franchise. As time has gone on, not only have I focused more on the quality of the site, but more stuff is happening in *Pokémon*. In past years, I would typically have a lot of times where I had nothing to do; as I have a policy of never skipping more than one calendar day in a row on the news updates, it got tricky to a point of having to contrive reasons to update. Now, though, I rarely have this issue. In 2015, I updated on 331 of the 365 days, and on the other days I was typically working on something else."

There's so much to love about *Pokémon* that it saddens us to hear the blinkered views of those who base their opinion of the franchise on the colourful promotional material and frankly ropey cartoon that emerged while it was still young enough to be considered a fad; before the franchise had even had a chance to prove itself and *long* before it had evolved into one of the complex RPG series made. "People think that *Pokémon* is a game for children but I believe that's a misunderstanding," says Sugimori, and we're inclined to agree – look beyond the presentation around it, peer deeper into its near-bottomless strategic complexities and you'll find an RPG deserving of far more respect and credit than it often gets. But while some can be harder to convince of the series' merits, those who are comfortably on the Pokémon Express make up an expansive player bases that spans



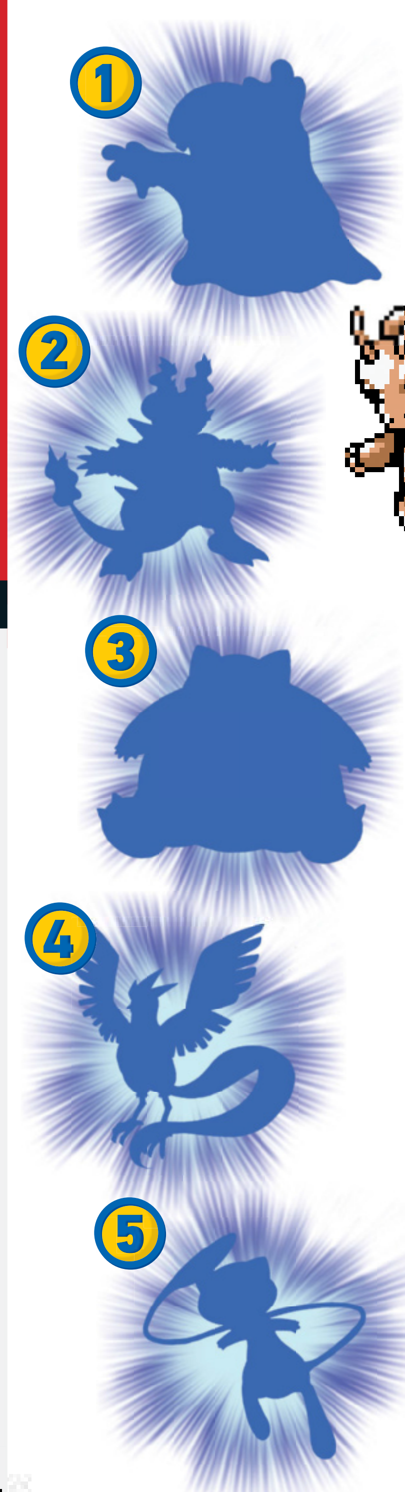
every age group and demographic imaginable, as you probably saw recently when *Pokémon Go* brought fans of all ages out of the woodwork in search of virtual creatures in the real world. "The community is by far my favourite thing about *Pokémon*," Merrick tells us. "Aside from a few elements within it, it's one of the friendliest communities around. People go out of their way to help others to find Pokémon. The game by design, has mandated to get people together to battle and trade, and it has continued to do that. There are people alive today because their parents met due to *Pokémon* and that is utterly incredible to me.

"Its impact back in the Nineties was phenomenal," he closes. "It was everywhere and everyone was playing it. I honestly never thought we'd see anything like that again. Then, *Go* happened and once again, *Pokémon* was everywhere. Whether or not we'll see an equal of that again? It's hard to say. The industry is far more volatile these days than it was back in the Nineties, and far more saturated. *Yo-kai Watch*, while huge for a few years in Japan, has diminished and, just hasn't taken off over here. I am unsure if we'll ever see a series permeating so many facets of media at once and be a phenomenon like *Pokémon* ever again." ★

Special thanks to Kalpesh Tailor and Emma Bunce of Nintendo for making this article possible.

Who's That Pokémon?

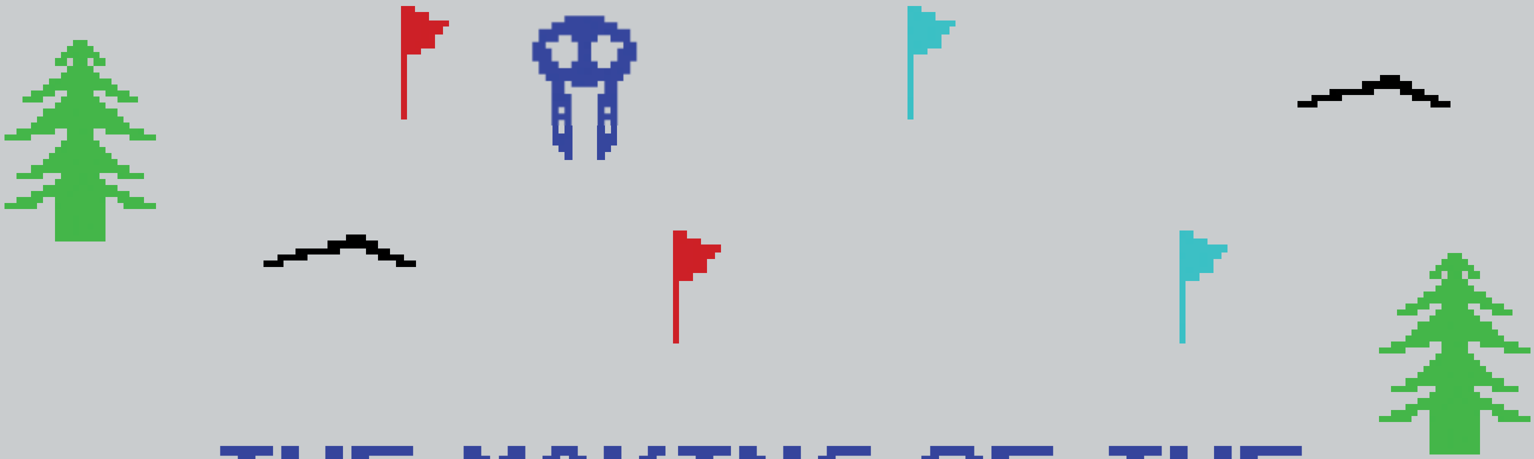
Are you a Pokémon Professor, or just a chump? Take our test to find out…





Answers: 1. Grimer 2. Magmar 3. Snorlax 4. Articuno 5. Mew





THE MAKING OF THE HORACE TRILOGY

A lucrative pack-in deal led to an odd character becoming a mascot. Beam Software founder Alfred Milgrom tells Rory Milne how Horace got hungry, went skiing and conquered spiders



It would be slightly unfair to describe early Eighties home computer gaming as wholly derivative, but a large percentage of the games produced for consumer microcomputers during this time did borrow heavily from popular coin-ops of the day. The early output of Australian firm Beam Software reflected this trend, and by the time that the ZX Spectrum launched in spring of 1982, founder Alfred Milgrom was looking to an arcade phenomenon for inspiration as he planned Beam's first Spectrum title.

"The idea of doing *Hungry Horace* was basically mine," Alfred begins. "At the time, there was really no game design in games development – everything was done by programmers – [there were] no designers, graphics artists and so on yet – and we were still finding out what could be done with the rudimentary power of the home computers. So the arcades were the source of inspiration for everyone. I was a very keen arcade game player, because that was where games came from. So I played a lot of games, and gave a lot of thought to what was the underlying essence of those games. When the first *Horace* game was developed,



"SOPHISTICATED GRAPHICS PACKAGES DID NOT EXIST"

Alfred Milgrom



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** PSION
» **DEVELOPER:** BEAM SOFTWARE
» **RELEASED:** 1982-1983
» **PLATFORM:** ZX Spectrum, C64, Dragon 32
» **GENRE:** VARIOUS

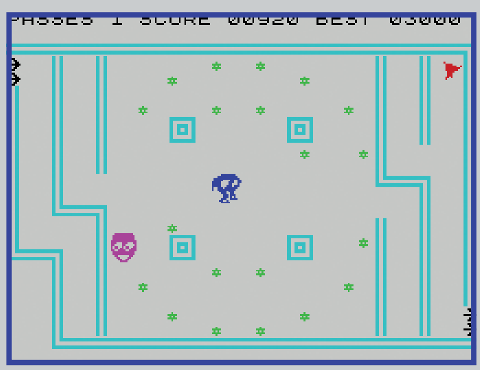
there was no thought about it becoming a three-game franchise. Obviously the gameplay borrowed very heavily from *Pac-Man*, but we needed to do something to differentiate it from being just a *Pac-Man* clone. So the fundamentals were there: 'eating' something and then some reason to have to run. I just brainstormed it around and came up with the idea of a cartoony character eating flowers in a park."

Having given his project a setting that would distinguish it from its coin-op inspiration, Alfred next created an entirely original-looking hero for his game, which he describes as the product of artistic limitation rather than skilful design. "Sophisticated graphics packages did not exist. So the image of *Hungry Horace* was one that I drew myself on graph paper, and I am certainly no artist! I knew the size of the sprite we were going to use as well as the programming restrictions. So I just designed a sprite with two big eyes and two legs, but it needed more character so I added a rat-tail, mullet hairstyle."

With the basics in place for his park-based maze-chase, Alfred brought Beam coder William Tang on board, who implemented the game's foundations and accidentally developed various innovative maze features. "As I recall, the first thing was to develop the program and once the basic mechanics were working we would improve and try new things. William Tang was very flexible like that and happy to adapt the program and try new things as we went along. Certainly we did not have a level editor at that time. The bridges and underpasses were a serendipitous consequence of how we were coding the mazes, but once we had that facility we played around to get a variety of mazes. Most of this design was done by William and then refined through testing."

One notable refinement saw Beam's emerging maze game adopt open-ended, rather than episodic levels, that could be left and looped back to without clearing their contents, which, as Alfred explains, was instigated in order to keep the gameplay fresh. "I think that this decision was made to make the game more interesting. If the player had to clear all the flowers in each level it would have became a little boring, [and] I think that William and I just got bored trying to finish all the levels!"

Further efforts were made by the pair to pep up their maze-based work-in-progress, but their game's equivalent of *Pac-Man*'s power-pills – a ringing bell – somehow developed a glitch where skilled players could achieve massive scores by repeatedly ▶



» [ZX Spectrum] *Hungry Horace*, wasn't your typical *Pac-Man* clone, although its inspiration is still clear to see.

“WE NEVER EVER CONSIDERED A TWO-PLAYER GAME”

Alfred Milgrom

collecting it. “This was a bug that was unnoticed before the game’s release,” Alfred concedes. “I would like to believe that people played to enjoy the game rather than run up huge points tallies. Of course, a side effect of the bug is that running up the points tally became meaningless so it made it a better game for people who just wanted to enjoy the game.”

But before Beam’s game could be enjoyed, or its design completed, Alfred was approached by Psion Software founder David Potter. “David had a relationship where Sinclair had asked him to bundle some games to be released with the Spectrum,” Alfred remembers, “and David contacted us. Fortunately we had *Hungry Horace* well down the road of development at the time so we jumped on the opportunity. It was a long time ago, so I don’t remember exactly at what point we sent the game to Psion. What I can tell you is that Psion did not interfere with the game design at all. They were not game developers, but very astute distributors. When they found out that we had a game that they could distribute they did their job excellently and left the game development to Beam.”

Psion did, however, come up with a name for Beam’s game – *Hungry Horace*. Unfortunately, a character in *The Beano* had the same name, which required David Potter to hastily obtain the rights from publisher DC Thomson in order to avoid potential legal action. Although unaware of the fuss, Alfred didn’t object to his project being renamed. “I don’t remember what name we had chosen for the game, but obviously it wasn’t very memorable! I did not know about Psion needing to ask for permission from the *Hungry Horace* comic strip, [but] I guess they were happy to take care of it.”

Having settled these rights issues, Psion launched *Hungry Horace* at the September 1982 Personal Computer World Show. Glowing reviews followed, and the game soon became a bestseller, which Alfred gives Psion boss David Potter due credit for. “I certainly had not expected *Hungry Horace* to have the success it achieved, although, of course, I was hoping for it! The success of *Horace* was a direct result of David Potter’s connections to Clive Sinclair. And although we got less money for each sale, the additional sales and visibility more than made up for it.”



» [ZX Spectrum] His motorway injuries a distant memory, Horace celebrates by going on the piste.



Psion's links with Sinclair additionally meant that *Hungry Horace* would ultimately be bundled with the Spectrum, and perhaps the knowledge that this was on the cards gave David Potter the confidence to talk sequels before Horace's debut had even launched. All of which sent Alfred back to the arcades. "Psion were excellent distributors, and I believe that they suggested that they could sell a sequel even before the original was released. Again, the inspiration was from the arcade, and we started off with motorway games mixed with *Frogger*. I can't recall who came up with the idea of skiing, but it allowed us to use known game mechanics but present a totally new twist on them. I think that there was some influence from a skiing game, but I do not remember if it was *Alpine Ski* or another game."

Forgotten influences aside, the skiing section in this new *Horace* title inspired the game's name – *Horace Goes Skiing*. The on-piste scenario also led Alfred and coder William Tang to institute a money mechanism that substituted for 'lives', and the *Frogger*-inspired sections allowed them to familiarise UK gamers with paying dollars for ambulances. "The ideas of 'lives' didn't sit well with the skiing theme, so we came up with the idea of money. Again, it was a case of taking the same mechanism and making it fresh. We chose dollars because we felt that this gave the game more of an international cachet. I must admit that it did not occur to me – or anyone else at Beam Software – that paying for ambulances was not a normal facet of lives everywhere!"



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE HOBBIT
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1982

THE WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1985

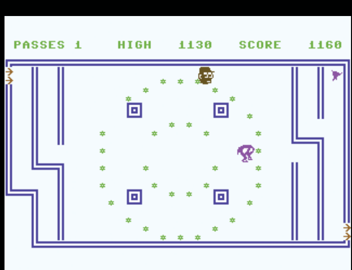
THE MUNCHER
SYSTEM: C64, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1988

Free Ambulance's aside, there is one feature that Alfred genuinely regrets not including in Horace's second outing – providing that turn-based motorway crossings followed by head-to-head ski runs could have been squeezed into the meagre 16K available to the game. "Unfortunately, we never ever considered a two-player game. I don't think that it would have used very much memory as all we would have needed to store was the two players scores and money at any time."

A more serious regret that Alfred has is that *Horace goes Skiing*'s hybrid motorway/ski slope gameplay led to it lacking the purity of Horace's first adventure. And while impressive sales and reviews followed the game's release, there were those that echoed Alfred's concerns. "It's very hard to make a sequel that will match the users' expectations," Alfred reasons. "Users see games – or movies or books – in a very different way than the developers. They have an emotional involvement with the characters and franchises that is not necessarily the result of a deliberate creation.

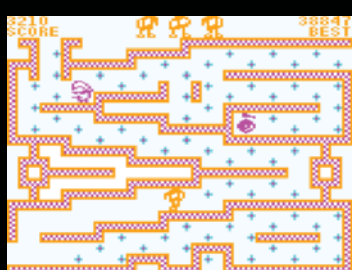
CONVERSION CAPERS

How the Horace games fared on other systems



HUNGRY HORACE
COMMODORE 64

■ Horace's first C64 outing is just as slick as the original and has near-identical graphics. Enhancements come in the form of a cheeky pregame tune featuring *Pac-Man* sound effects and melodic in-game jingles when you get apprehended, enter a new level or catch a guard after turning the tables.



HUNGRY HORACE
DRAGON 32

■ Despite having less screen real estate than the Spectrum, the Dragon 32 *Hungry Horace* provides more flowers for Horace to munch, but otherwise this is a faithful adaptation. Its visual tweaks include dancing Horaces representing lives left, kaleidoscopic death sequences and Horace being orange.



HORACE GOES SKIING
COMMODORE 64

■ Unlike the Spectrum original, Horace isn't in perpetual motion in the C64 version's motorway section, which obviously gives you more control over his movement. The other main differences are the lack of ski jumps and that drivers beep their horns at C64 Horace when he runs out in front of them.



HORACE GOES SKIING
DRAGON 32

■ Due to lack of screen space, Dragon 32 Horace faces a scarily congested motorway before he hits the slopes; so a lot of scurrying about is required in order to cross. Additionally, there are no ambulances, but there are JCBs! And like the C64 version, Dragon Horace doesn't go ski jumping.

SPECTRUM MASCOTS

More Spectrum characters that became the system's icons

DIZZY

■ A Spectrum regular during its twilight years, Dizzy fronted numerous adventures. Given his sterling support for the machine later on, it seems only fair that Dizzy ultimately became a mascot for both the Spectrum and Amstrad.

JETMAN

■ Where Horace became a mascot thanks to wide-scale exposure, Ultimate's sci-fi everyman achieved emblematic status due to the style and originality of his games. That said, Jetman's bitmap is genuinely iconic.

SABREMAN

■ If Jetman redefined 16K Spectrum gaming, then Sabreman surely did the same for Sinclair's 48K model. His introduction boasted sprawling gameplay, but he cemented his mascot status in the interactive cartoon *Knight Lore*.

WALLY WEEK

■ His games could be slightly obscure, but there's no denying their quality. Despite being introduced in a platformer, Wally Week's rank of Spectrum mascot was largely attained thanks to a string of acclaimed adventure titles.

ZIGGY

■ Jetman's first outing created a huge demand for original rather than coin-op derived Spectrum gaming. Ziggy rode this wave with slick shooters like The Pyramid and he soon became synonymous with Sinclair's popular system.

MONTY MOLE

■ Due to his creator's wicked sense of humour, Monty Mole is best remembered for starring in unforgiving games. But despite this apparent failing, the somersaulting mole proved highly popular and soon became a Spectrum icon.

MAGIC KNIGHT

■ Like Wally before him, the Magic Knight debuted in a straight platformer before heading into arcade adventure territory. Impressively, the armoured hero's games were all budget titles, which may have bolstered his iconic status.

MINER WILLY

■ Although influenced by a US gaming icon, Miner Willy is a decidedly British creation. Willy's surreal Spectrum debut was an instant classic, but his chart-topping sequel secured his place as a Spectrum mascot bar none.

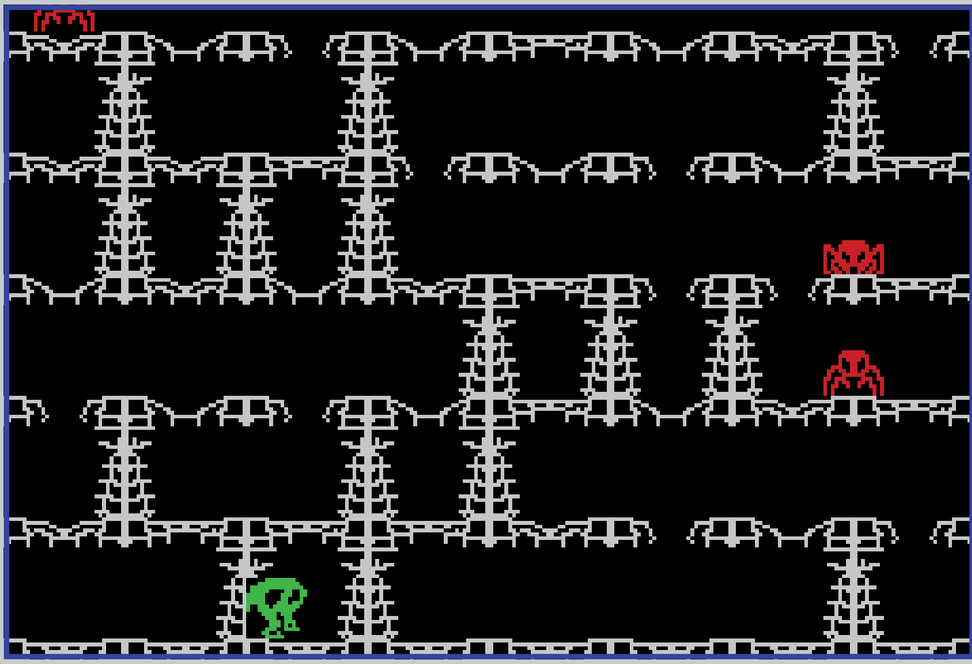


» [ZX Spectrum] Horace doesn't go skiing because he's spent all of his money on skis and ambulances!

Game programmers, on the other hand, especially at the time, were not so much interested in character development as expanding what they could do with the hardware. So we wanted to push the limits of what we offered in a game: more gameplay, two types of games in one game, more levels, better graphics and so on. And as we went further away from a simple game – and did not stick so closely to an arcade game – we lost some of the addictive nature of the original *Horace*."

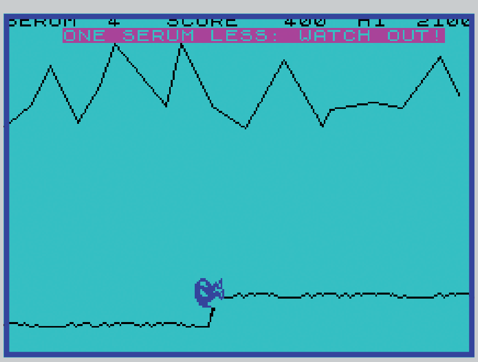
But as with Horace's original outing, *Horace Goes Skiing* was bundled with the Spectrum, which helped shift units of the already popular title as well as making a third *Horace* title a foregone conclusion. Alfred doesn't remember which games influenced *Horace And The Spiders*, but he pours water on the theory that his decision to pit Horace against deadly spiders was subconsciously affected by the poisonous arachnids found in his Australian homeland. "Haha! If the decision was subconscious then it remains in the subconscious part of my brain!" Alfred jokes. "I don't think it had much to do with being in Australia, but it's hard to know what are the unconscious motivations for decisions."





Arachnids aside, a bug of a different type also appeared in *Horace And The Spiders* where if you walked backwards on the game's first stage you would get transported to level two, but Alfred explains how he would likely have made this into a feature had he or cocreator William Tang spotted the glitch. "I think that if we had noticed it we would have made more use of it. This was before the time that we discovered that adding features to a game in development is a very bad thing and can have unintended consequences. Even very cool features added at the wrong time during development can totally destroy the addictiveness of a game. But at that time we didn't know that so we would take a 'feature' and run with it."

Although Alfred and William missed the chance to make transportation an official part of their third *Horace* title, they did ensure that *Horace* had some challenges to overcome including jumping over spiders, swinging from web-to-web, stamping holes in cobwebs and dispatching trapped arachnids. Alfred puts the difficulty of *Horace And The Spiders* compared to its predecessors down to concerns over making the game too easy. "Developers get bored and think that the games are too simple, so they try to up the challenge. We did not have anyone in the role of a game designer, so many issues relating to the gameplay were not fully thought through. Also, it is difficult to predict what will make a game addictive. It may be that a small tweak would have made all the difference or something that we included should not have been there."



» [ZX Spectrum] A mistimed jump on *Horace And The Spiders'* first level costs Horace an anti-spider serum.

Unlike Horace's earlier outings, *Horace And The Spiders* wasn't released on the C64 and Dragon 32, but Alfred clarifies that this had nothing to do with Horace's Spectrum publisher. "Psion's role was distribution of games through Sinclair. Melbourne House retained all the retail distribution rights. But Psion did not ask us to restrict the development of any games to Sinclair machines only. The games did not sell well on other platforms because there was not that initial push that created the audience. We kept the franchise going only as long as it was successful on the Spectrum."

On the subject of keeping the *Horace* franchise going, Alfred reveals a few details about Beam's shelved fourth *Horace* game – *Horace To The Rescue* – but his memories of the title have all but faded and he has no knowledge of the whereabouts of the game's coder. "It's too long ago. Certainly there are only a few tropes in game design and 'rescue the princess' is one of them. *Horace To The Rescue* was based on this idea, but I cannot remember the details. It is true that William Tang had a collapsed lung and that this severely curtailed his ability to work at that time. But the *Horace* series was no longer so important so we did not feel the need to get another programmer on to the project. So William looking after his health at that time was a higher priority. Unfortunately, I have not kept in touch with him."

But although Alfred has lost touch with the cocreator of the *Horace* trilogy, the Beam Software founder has clearly kept Horace close to his heart and expresses pride tinged with only a little regret when asked to look back at his three classic *Horace* titles. "I think we went off track with *Horace And The Spiders*. The nature of games on the Spectrum was changing by that time and I feel we did not manage to increase game sophistication and yet keep the naive charm of the original character. But I must say that I am very proud of these games and probably wouldn't change a thing of *Hungry Horace* and *Horace Goes Skiing*." *

Many thanks to Alfred for sharing his memories.

BOB SMITH ON HORACE

A few words with the Horace In The Mystic Woods developer

What are your memories of the original three *Horace* games?

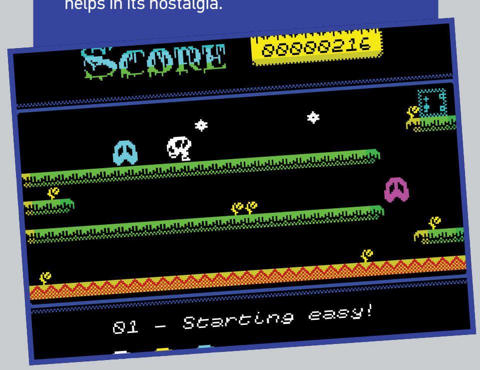
I think *Hungry Horace* was one of the first games available for the Spectrum at its launch, and so one of the first I had. It wasn't like other games that you might have seen before in the arcades – it had a crisp and colourful look, and was smooth and playable. When *Horace Goes Skiing* came along it was equally as playable, but a lot more fun and a completely different game to be learned, and then again with *Horace And The Spiders* – although I never was very good at that one!

How did the Spectrum *Horace In The Mystic Woods* conversion come about?

The game was mentioned on the World Of Spectrum forums and how it was a shame that it wasn't on the Spectrum. The original author, Michael Ware, said he'd be pleased if it happened, and one of the Mojon Twins group started work on it but later found that he didn't have the time available to spend on it. I then offered to convert the game [and] got the gig. It was a difficult conversion due to the different resolutions of the machines and the physics that had been added to Horace's movement. And since there wasn't a decent emulator for the Psion machine I had to buy one, and a copy of the game, in order to do a faithful conversion.

How would you explain Horace's enduring popularity?

All the *Horace* games were special and different to each other, but always difficult to master and progress through and the releases were spaced apart, which made each new one something to look forward to. The fact that the series didn't overstay it's welcome, or continue into the 16-bit era, only helps in its nostalgia.



DARIUS

WARNING! A HUGE BATTLESHIP IS APPROACHING FAST.
With that oft-quoted alert the deep-sea beasties of Darius emerge, Cthulu-like, from the depths. But as Martyn Carroll discovers, Taito's shooter is much more than just another videogame trope

The *Darius* series doesn't always get the attention it deserves. This is particularly true outside of Japan where historically Konami's *Gradius* and Irem's *R-Type* are the two leading names when it comes to side-scrolling shooters. They may be more popular, and some would say more important, but they both struggle to match the sheer prevalence of *Darius*. Since the original coin-op debuted in 1986, there have been six core sequels, most with multiple revisions, plus numerous home versions, many with unique additions, and various spin-offs. If you totalled them all up you'd be looking at more than 30 releases over a 30-year period, culminating in the recent *Dariusburst: Chronicle Saviours* for PS4, Vita and PC. That's quite some achievement.


» [Arcade] Use your aerial bombs to take out the large number of ground turrets, otherwise you won't get far.

The series has evolved over time but its hallmarks were firmly established in the original coin-op. First up was the debut of Silver Hawk, a small, yet powerful, craft in the mould of Vic Viper from *Gradius*. There were two Silver Hawks in fact, one for ace pilot Proco and the other for his female companion Tiat, who entered the fray in two-player games. The plot was the usual alien invasion affair, but memorably the enemies in *Darius* were a weird kind of mechanised marine life. This was especially true of the end-of-level bosses – or rather 'battleships' – which looked like someone had fused together the contents of a fish tank and a cutlery drawer. *Darius* was almost certainly the first game where you went into battle against a giant fish with a colander on its head.

The original game also introduced the branching stage staple. Having defeated a boss you could choose one of two routes, each leading to a different zone. There were 28 zones in total but you could reach the end of the game by finishing just seven of them. As such, the invitation was there to play through the game several times, exploring different routes. The stage structure was similar to the branching road in *Out Run*, although there were no easy routes – they were all hard! Some zones were slightly less challenging than others but generally *Darius* was a difficult game, particularly if you were playing solo.











PIXEL PERFECT

A small selection of the mechanical critters you can blast



DEVELOPER Q&A

Christian Pennycate recalls how he shoehorned Darius onto the ZX Spectrum

How did you end up with the job of converting *Darius* to the Spectrum?
I was one of those geeky kids that wrote computer games. Before *Darius* I had written a fair few, so it was a case of being in the right place at the right time. As with most publishers back then, I sent in a demo and made a few calls. They invited me for a chat and I ended up with the job of *Darius*.

Did you feel at all daunted by the task of converting such an impressive coin-op?
Actually, this game was one of my all-time favourite to develop. Where I would normally have given constraints to the graphic artist, on this occasion I decided to give him full reign, as in let the artist decide, or at least drive, some of the design decisions. This proved to be a winning formula. The artist was actually very good – it was none other than Mark Healey, [future cofounder of Media Molecule]. Mark was a colleague of mine and we worked together on many games over a number of years.

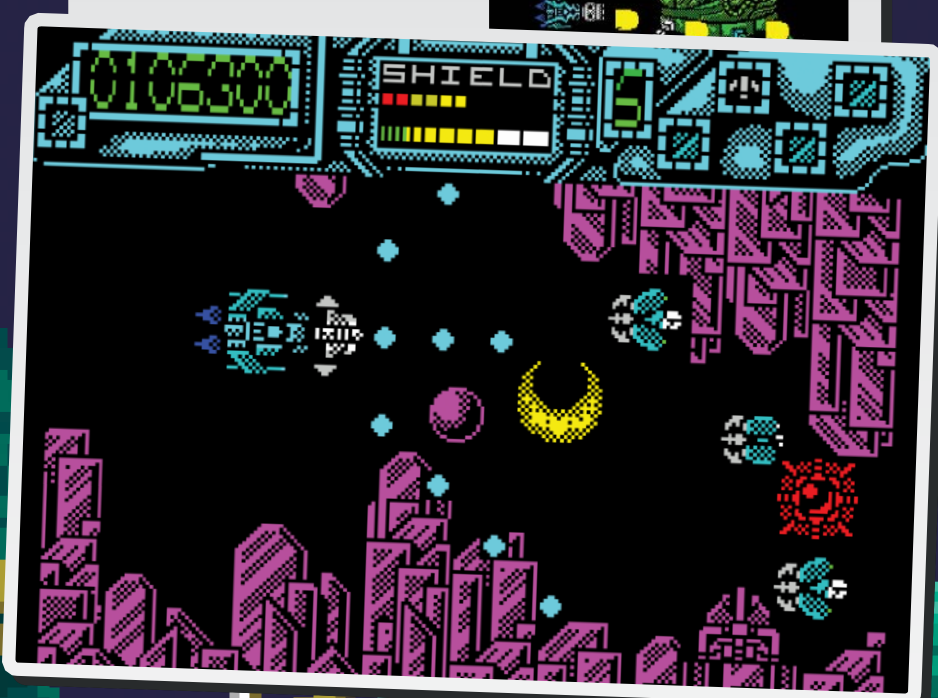
Did you have access to the coin-op machine during development?
We didn't, but we did have access to either the Amiga or Atari ST version.

How long did the development take, and what was the most challenging aspect?
I don't recall the development duration but I wouldn't be surprised if we reached four months. The trickiest part was to get decent speed performance from the big bosses at the end of each level as they consumed a large part of the screen. It worked out quite well, I think.

How pleased were you with the product and how it progressed?
It was a very enjoyable Speccy game to make, principally as I think we struck the right balance between creative/graphics and code development. In Mark I had a great creative artist on the job, so it made for a fun project.

Finally, how was your working relationship with Edge Software?
Edge was a husband-and-wife team. At the time I regarded *Darius* as a relatively strong game, so I was grateful to have landed the opportunity to work on such a big title. It was a dot on my game development journey and it was fun whilst it lasted. Gladly, I'm no longer a game developer but I'm still in the computer business.





You could power-up Silver Hawk, of course, by collecting coloured globes that were relinquished by enemies. Your main missiles and bombs could be upgraded and you could also grab armour that withstood a certain number of enemy shots. Some kind of upgrade was almost essential when taking on the later bosses. Perhaps the most obvious omission was the lack of a speed upgrade. Silver Hawk isn't exactly slow, but not being able to boost your speed does seem strange in the wake of *Gradius*, *Salamander* and the like.

But *Darius* always had one huge plus point compared to competing shooters: its incredible panoramic playing field. Instead of displaying the action on a single 4:3 monitor, the game utilised three 13-inch monitors side-by-side which resulted in a super, *super* widescreen display that was equivalent to 864x224 pixels. *Darius* certainly wasn't the first coin-op to utilise a three-screen display – Tatsumi's driving games *TX-1* and *Buggy Boy* did it previously, but in these cases the screens were clearly separate and the left and right screens were even angled slightly towards the player. What Taito did was align the monitors in a specific way (the middle monitor facing the player and the left and right ones on their backs, facing up) and then use a mirror to create a single, unbroken display. The illusion worked brilliantly and gave the game instant wow factor. The cab was large and imposing too, as you'd expect with three monitors to house. It also featured stereo speakers

> **"The trickiest part was to get decent speed performance from the big bosses"**
> Christian Pennycate

that blasted out Hisayoshi Ogura's wild soundtrack and complimented the game's cinematic feel.

The game was primarily available as a wide, stand-up cab but there was also a deluxe sit-down version that featured a vibrating seat! It was this version that the UK gaming press encountered at the annual ATEI show in January 1987. Clare Edgeley of *C&VG* was impressed, commenting: "The beauty of the game (other than the vibrating seat!) is the panoramic view as the scene unrolls before you. It's great fun and worth looking out for." Teresa Maughan of *Your Sinclair* loved it, writing: "I've never seen or played anything quite like it before. *Darius* left me buzzing with excitement."

Despite the unique display, it was predicted that the game would still be converted to home systems. This did indeed happen, but not in the way many imagined. Edge Software picked up the rights and released versions for the Atari ST, Amiga and Spectrum that were closer to *R-Type* than *Darius*. A faithful version was later developed by NEC for the PC Engine. ▶



» [Arcade] Most of the bosses have a weak spot: their mouths. Concentrate all of your fire there when they open wide!



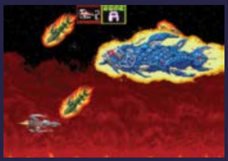
» [Arcade] It looks relatively straightforward, but this section is incredibly hard to negotiate. Fly carefully.



» [Arcade] In some zones the terrain is your biggest enemy. Trying to squeeze through this cave system is far from easy.

THE DARIUS LEGACY

There are lots of games in the Darius series, but these six are considered core...



DARIUS II

ARCADE, 1989

■ An excellent sequel that outshines the original, featuring new power-ups, imaginative level design and improved visuals (the parallax effect is stunning). As a statement of intent, the original bosses return here as mere mid-level bosses! This was ported to the PC Engine, Mega Drive, Saturn and PS2.



DARIUS TWIN

SNES, 1991

■ The third game in the series was released exclusively for the SNES, although it borrows heavily from the two arcade games and many of the earlier bosses return. Screen space is obviously limited, but to mix things up the screen occasionally moves diagonally and vertically.



DARIUS FORCE

SNES, 1993

■ The second SNES exclusive is the pick of the two and ranks up there with the best shooters on the system. Surprisingly there's no co-op play, but now there's a choice of three different Silver Hawks to pilot. There are 15 zones in total and the majority of the bosses are unique to this game.



DARIUS GAIDEN

ARCADE, 1994

■ Often championed as the series' zenith, *Gaiden* is a sprite-based shooter par excellence. Running on Taito's F3 system, the game is stunning and packed with extravagant effects. In one nice touche you can enlist mini-bosses to fight alongside you.



G-DARIUS

ARCADE, 1997

■ While serving as a prequel to the original, this entry pushes things forward technically with 3D polygon graphics. Building on the capture feature from the previous game, you can now call on many other enemies to fight for you. Ports for the PC and PlayStation followed (the arcade hardware was actually based on the PSone).



DARIUSBURST

PSP, 2009

■ The series became relevant again thanks to this update. It's classic *Darius* in many respects, with the addition of the 'Burst' laser that you charge up by destroying enemies. This release revitalised the series, leading to new titles in arcades, on mobile and on home systems.

BOSS RUSH

A rundown of every ugly/beautiful boss in Darius and how to defeat them



KING FOSSIL

FOUND IN **ZONE A**

■ The first boss has gone on to become the most recognisable enemy in *Darius* history, rearing its head in almost every game in the series. It is based on the coelacanth fish.

How to beat it: King Fossil is easy to beat, as it just moves up and down. Just target its open mouth with your firepower and it'll go down.

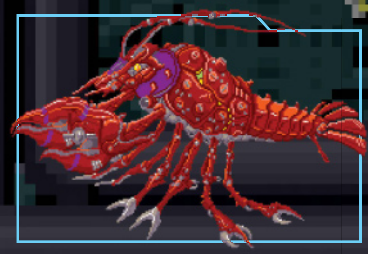


ELECTRIC FAN

FOUND IN **ZONE B, C**

■ Although it resembles a demented desk fan, this boss is actually based on a sea anemone. Electric Fan is a recurring enemy throughout the series and even cameos in *Rainbow Islands*.

How to beat it: Dodge the lasers and homing missiles it fires, and just keep firing into its mouth at the centre of the 'fan' when it opens.

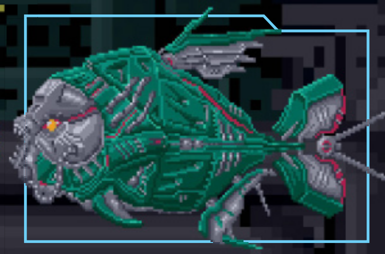


DUAL SHEARS

FOUND IN **ZONE D, E, F**

■ A large lobster-type boss that impresses with its sheer size. Dual Shears appears in all of the home versions of *Darius* but did not return for any of the arcade sequels.

How to beat it: The boss's mouth is its soft spot. To make things easier, you can first destroy its laser-firing pincers to leave it vulnerable.



FATTY GLUTTON

FOUND IN **ZONE G, H, I, J**

■ This brilliantly-named foe is another series regular, showing up in most of the games and being generally annoying. It is based on the piranha and is as nasty as you'd imagine.

How to beat it: Note that its missiles unleash a spread of shots that can be difficult to avoid. Otherwise keep moving and aiming at its mouth.

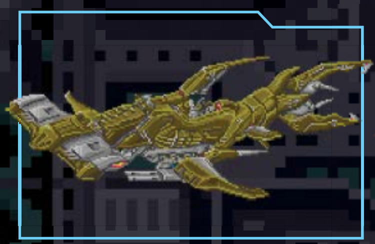


KEEN BAYONET

FOUND IN **ZONE K, L, M, N, O**

■ This irate swordfish is one of the trickier bosses in the game as it unleashes a number of different projectiles from its mouth and two fins. Try not to get bayoneted!

How to beat it: Like Dual Shears, you can get stuck in, targeting its mouth (it only counts if the mouth is open however), or you can blow away its fins first to reduce its firepower.



IRON HAMMER

FOUND IN **ZONE P, Q, R, S, T, U**

■ The most prevalent boss in the game, appearing in six separate zones in a variety of colours. As its name and distinctive shape suggests, it's related to the hammerhead shark.

How to beat it: This will target you with lasers that rip across the screen and can be difficult to avoid. Concentrate fire on its head and keep plugging away. This one can take a lot of damage.



STRONG SHELL

FOUND IN **ZONE V**

■ The first of the 'final' bosses, Strong Shell is the perfect name for this fortified sea turtle. Its shell is home to gun turrets that ramp up this boss's offensive onslaught.

How to beat it: The sensible option is to work on the turrets as they can be destroyed, leaving the boss open to attack. Then, wait for it to expose its head and hit it with missiles and bombs.



GREEN CORONATUS

FOUND IN **ZONE W**

■ This seahorse-type creature is a fearsome foe with a range of projectile attacks. Its weak point is its head but it's wise enough to come to the fight wearing protection!

How to beat it: You need to hit it in the head, but to do that you must first blast away its metal headgear. It's optional, but you can make the battle slightly easier by blasting away the tail.

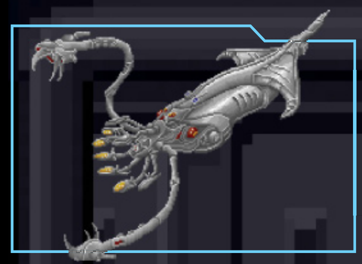


OCTOPUS

FOUND IN **ZONE X**

■ This eight-legged monster doesn't have a fancy moniker but it's an impressive sight all the same, filling one side of the screen. Its tentacles are laser-firing appendages of death.

How to beat it: Target its tentacles to reduce its firepower. Once the boss is in a more manageable state, hit it between the eyes.



CUTTLEFISH

FOUND IN **ZONE Y**

■ Probably the toughest boss in the entire game. Cuttlefish is a real menace due to the amount of offensive fire it unleashes, from its mouth and two 'claws'.

How to beat it: You should target the limbs and then hit the mouth in the usual fashion. The best option is to avoid Zone Y altogether, though.



GREAT THING

FOUND IN **ZONE Z**

■ The main boss of the game – and the series as a whole, as it often appears as the final challenge. This giant whale is heavily armed and will take time and skill to slaughter.

How to beat it: Keep left and twitch up and down to avoid the barrage of fire. It's wise to enter this fight with maxed-out weaponry.

> "The artist was actually very good – it was none other than Mark Healey"
> Christian Pennycate



» [Arcade] Despite the marine theme, only a few zones are actually set underwater.

The arcade sequel arrived in 1989. Like the original, Darius *II* (which for reasons unknown was released in some regions as *Sagaia*) reused the three-monitor system, although a less-common two-screen alternative was also manufactured. However, the series would not return to its trademark panoramic display for another 20 years. This was understandable for game three (*Darius Twin*, 1991) and four (*Darius Force*, 1993) as they were developed for the SNES rather than the arcade. The series returned to the arcades in 1994 with fan favourite *Darius Gaiden*, which was initially unveiled as *Darius III*, suggesting that Taito did not always consider the SNES games to be core entries. *Darius Gaiden* utilised a 4:3 display, as did 1997's *G Darius*, the first game in the series to ditch sprites for polygons.

After a gap of 12 years the series returned in 2009 with *Dariusburst* for the PSP. Making the most of the handheld's 16:9 screen, the new game was a superb shooter that would form the basis for all recent *Darius* titles. The following year the PSP game was retooled and enhanced for the arcades and the result was the sensational coin-op release *Another Chronicle*. Harking back to the original, the game featured an insane 32:9 widescreen display and even brought back the vibrating seat. The recently-released home versions are very good, but in all honesty *Another Chronicle* is meant to be played in the arcade, on a massive screen, alongside other players, on a vibrating seat. The very same can be said about the first two games in the series.

Darius is now under the stewardship of shoot-'em-up specialists *G.rev*, so we can surely expect more wonderful and wildly over-the-top titles in the future. There are plenty more robot fish in the sea after all. *

CONVERSION CAPERS

How the various home versions of Darius measure up



ATARI ST

1989

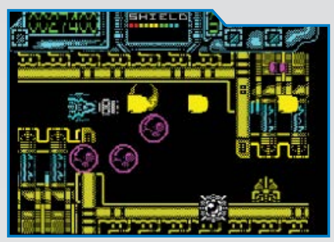
■ Titled *Darius+* (not to be confused with *Darius Plus* on the PC Engine) this is not *Darius* as you know it, playing more like an *R-Type* clone. The graphics are too large, meaning that the cramped game screen becomes horribly cluttered and makes it borderline unplayable. A missed opportunity.



AMIGA

1989

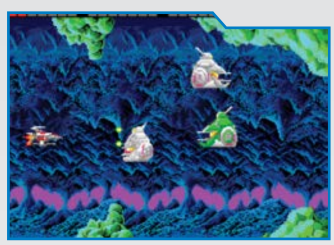
■ Developed by the same team and at the same time as the ST version, so there's not much to choose between them. This version runs quite a bit quicker and smoother than its Atari counterpart (this is most noticeable during the boss battles), but it's sunk by the same playability issues as the ST release.



ZX SPECTRUM

1990

■ This was based on the 16-bit conversion rather than the coin-op, so it's not a great game although it does deserve bonus marks for the level of ambition on show. The graphics are really large and colourful, and the bosses are suitable imposing, but it's a game that's better to look at than play.



PC ENGINE

1990

■ The first recognisable home version of *Darius* arrived on the PC Engine in 1990, on CD (as *Super Darius*) and HuCard (as *Darius Plus*). The CD version expands on the coin-op by featuring individual bosses for each zone. While the move to a 4:3 display is well handled, the versions are very challenging.



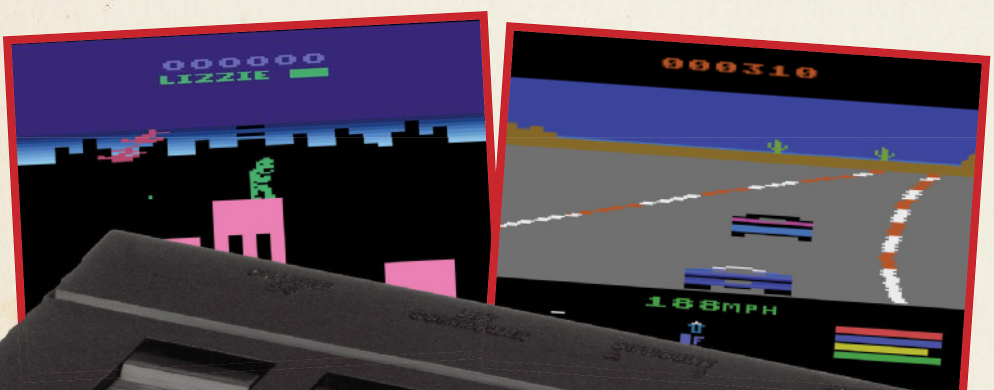
GAME BOY ADVANCE

2002

■ Released in 2002, only in Japan, *Darius R* is a version of the original game for the GBA. It's based on the PC Engine conversion and as such features several new bosses that don't appear in the coin-op. A valiant attempt, but the screen doesn't lend itself to *Darius*, and too many zones are missing.

ATARI

The Atari 2600 enjoyed a long life. First launched in 1977, it wasn't discontinued until 1992. One of the reasons for this longevity was its 1986 relaunch, so we sent Kieren Hawken to find out how Atari brought the fun back





Although the design of the Atari 2600 Jr. is very much seen as a product of the Tramiel-era of Atari, the 'Junior' project was started under the stewardship of Warner Brothers with the aim to produce a cost-reduced version of the 2600 console, codenamed 'Val'. The CX-2000, as it was also known (its dedicated part number), would be an all-in-one unit with built-in joysticks to appeal to the budget market. As well as the new design, this unit would also feature a new chipset where Atari planned to reduce the 6507 CPU, 6532 RIOT chip and the TIA down into one single chip. Alongside this unit would be another, codenamed 'Bonnie', that would keep the same basic design but instead use detachable joysticks – this would be the replacement for the existing 2600 model. However extensive testing proved that the Val's built-in joysticks were far too flimsy and the design of the actual unit was considered to be too ugly and not in keeping with the style of the Atari brand, so it was back to the drawing board for the team.

Atari returned to a previously-unused design for inspiration, but not one of its own. Toy manufacturer Milton Bradley, which was also marketing the rival Vectrex console, had designed the prototype Voice Commander Module for Atari, based on a similar unit

2600 Jr.

> **“Nolan [Bushnell] helped with some initial direction of the games and also reviewed the game designs along the way”**
> Steve DeFrisco

released for the TI-99 home computer. Although it had been advertised in catalogues and shown to the press, Atari never put this into production, however the 2600 Jr. project still went ahead. Regan Cheng had previously designed a mock-up for the Atari 2600 Jr., based on the looks of existing the Atari 1200XL home computer. Mark Biassotti then merged this design from Atari with Milton Bradley’s concept. Mark would also design the case for the cancelled 5200 Jr (see the boxout on this page). The plan was that the Jr. model would be sold inside a small lunchbox-style box with a handle for portability, it would cost less than $50 and be geared towards a younger market – with the new Atari 7800 ProSystem console aimed at more experienced gamers. Atari was also planning to release a series of new games based on popular cartoon characters such as Bugs Bunny, Donald Duck and Garfield to appeal to this new youthful audience, however none of these games made it into production.

Upon his acquisition of the Atari consumer division Jack Tramiel set about to revive the Atari 2600 Jr. project to help shift the masses of inventory the company was sitting on and help kickstart the videogames division. After the successful launch of the 16-bit Atari ST computer Jack Tramiel started to put his plans for the new division in place by hiring Michael Katz from Epyx in November 1985. He would take up the role of president in Atari’s new Entertainment Electronics Division and he soon set about recruiting developers to produce games for the relaunched 2600 console, as well as the 7800. After clearing all the existing inventory of 2600 ‘Vader’ models (which was clad in black, much like the Sith lord), Atari officially launched the new version of the 2600 console in January 1986. It would come bundled with a joystick and *Centipede* cartridge in the previously planned lunchbox-style box. Dubbed the ‘Junior’ or ‘Jr.’, although never officially stating it on the packaging, this revitalised Atari 2600 was be heavily pushed on both TV and press adverts using the slogans that attempted to bring memories back from Atari’s previous successes with the 2600 system, stating that “the fun is back!” and it was the “world’s bestselling game console!” The TV adverts featured young gamers playing a selection of the system’s most popular games with somebody rapping *Fun Is Back* over the top in an attempt to make the console seem new and ‘hip’. Later versions of the advert featured the kids rapping themselves as well as footage of much newer games made specifically for the 2600 Jr., such as *Midnight Magic*, *Solaris* and *RealSports Boxing*. The new games would feature a smart, dark red box that made the 2600 name more prevalent than previous game box designs.

When it came to games Michael was having a hard time ▶

ATARI 5200 JR.

The Atari 5200 is nicknamed ‘Big Sexy’ for a reason, despite its futuristic (for the Eighties, at least) design the console is absolutely huge! ‘How big?’ We hear you ask… Well at 15”x13”x4.25” it’s bigger than even the original Xbox. The case included a hatch on the back that you could open to store your controllers. The huge size of the console did nothing to help the cost of the producing it, either – Atari had already removed two of the original four joystick ports in a cost-saving measure and planned to reduce this expense further with a complete redesign. However, the North American video game crash hit Atari hard and made sure the 5200 was never even released outside of its native region. The 5100, or ‘Little PAM’ as it was also known was promptly cancelled and dumped in favour of the new 2600 compatible 7800 ProSystem.









REVISIONIST ATARI HISTORY



Atari Lynx II

■ The biggest criticism of the original Lynx handheld was its colossal size. At just shy of a foot long it was debatable for many if it was even handheld. So Atari went back to the drawing board and came up with a new much more compact design in the Lynx II model that was a full inch and half shorter than the original.



Atari XE Games System

■ Although the Atari 8-bit computer was redesigned numerous times, it's the last entry in this line that is the most interesting. With the XEGS, Atari decided to correct everything that was wrong with the Atari 5200 and produce a console that was fully compatible with all existing games and peripherals.



Atari Jaguar Duo

■ Sadly the Jaguar Duo was never released due to the early demise of the original Jaguar console but several prototype versions were shown off at various expos. This system would combine both the standard console and CD attachment into one sleek unit that would have the added boon of being cheaper to buy.

▶ recruiting big companies to produce titles for Atari's relaunched consoles as Nintendo already had prominent developers tied up to exclusivity contracts. With the 2600 he returned to the system's roots to try and find people who had worked with the machine before. One of the first people he approached was Atari cofounder Nolan Bushnell and his new company Axlon. Nolan, at the time, was working on his company's line of robots. One of the first people Nolan brought in to help get this venture off the ground was former Imagic programmer Steve DeFrisco, and he remembers this day well. "Nolan came to me and said that Atari had contacted him, wanting to have some new titles with Nolan's name on the box for the rerelease of the cost-reduced 2600." Interestingly, Steve hadn't previously programmed any games for the 2600, being assigned to the Intellivision instead at his former company. "At Imagic I was interested in the Atari 2600, but at that time it was considered too difficult for beginning programmers to work on," he explains. "There was also a shortage of development systems for the Atari 2600 at Imagic. While I discussed the graphics capabilities with Bob Smith, Brad Stewart, and Rob Fulop, I initially worked on the Intellivision, and later the Atari 800. I had started programming on my Atari 800 at home, [studying] at college, so I understood something of the display capabilities of the 2600." But how much input did Nolan have into the games himself? "Nolan helped with some initial direction of the games and also reviewed the game designs along the way, but the major work was done by the programmers on each of the projects." Atari provided assistance to the programmers, as Steve explains: "Atari Corp. provided game development platforms and all the documentation that was available, along with some code. Included was the six-character kernel that was used to display six numbers on a single line for scores etc.. The extra RAM and ROM Atari provided was



» [Atari 2600] Released in 1989, Activision's Atari 2600 conversion of *Double Dragon* features some impressive music.

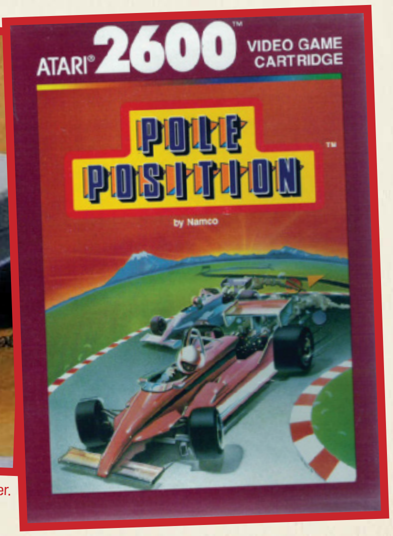
also a big help in writing more complicated and larger games on the 2600 machine, too."

Axlon later hired Tod '*Pac-Man*' Frye to assist with 2600 development and Atari recruited Bob '*Defender*' Polaro on a freelance basis, too. Tod worked on games such as *Save Mary* and *Shooting Gallery* but sadly all his later titles went unreleased when Atari stopped 2600 development to focus on the Lynx. Bob had better luck and produced the 2600 version of isometric 7800 shoot-'em-up *Desert Falcon* as well as conversions of two Atari arcade games in *Road Runner* and *Sprintmaster*. Bob would also program the impressive port of the hit Bally Midway arcade game *Rampage* for Activision. Persuading Activision to come back to the system that made it famous was a big coup for Atari. Starting with a port of David Crane's bestselling computer game *Ghostbusters*, Activision released a string of 2600 games that utilised all the new techniques made available by the advances in technology and much larger ROM sizes. *Commando*, *Kung Fu Master* and *Double Dragon* all proved to be competent conversions; and the old-school 2600 fans were pleased, thanks to a follow up to then-successful

"It was tough, really tough. Since I knew how good the original River Raid was and assumed people would make comparisons"
David Lubar



» Regan Cheng's original concept design for the 2600 Jr. based on the looks of the 1200XL computer.



ATARI 2600 **'WOODY'** VS. ATARI 2600 **'JR.'**



River Raid. But with original creator Carol Shaw no longer in employment, the team turned to David Lubar for assistance. David had previously programmed 2600 games for both 20th Century Fox and Spectravideo, producing titles such as *Fantastic Voyage*, *Flash Gordon* and *Challenge Of Nexar*. "It was tough, really tough," Steve recalls, when remembering making the sequel. "Since I knew how good the original *River Raid* was, I assumed people would make comparisons. Honestly though, as good as *River Raid II* turned out, I think the original is still the best."

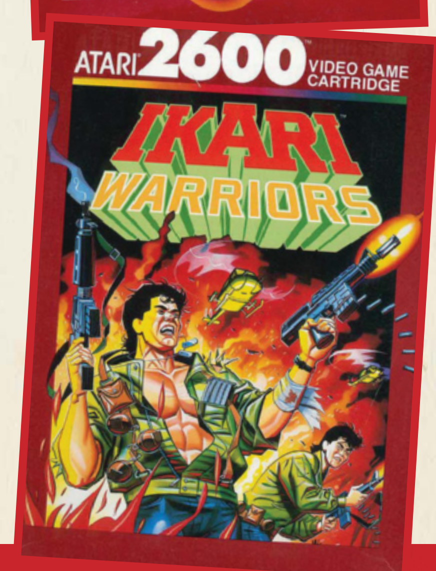
David's second game for Activision was also one of the consoles best, but by 1990 the 2600 was considered tired in North America so *My Golf* only ended up being released in PAL regions where the console was still selling well as a budget machine. Despite only having nine holes, *My Golf* was an impressive attempt at recreating the popular sport and is widely regarded as one of the consoles most technically-impressive titles. David is quite humble about his achievement, though: "It really wasn't more difficult to program than other games I made, as far as I remember anyway. Although I did really like the way it came out." Activision would also end up releasing the Atari 2600's last two commercial games, *Acid Drop* and *Ghostbusters II*, in 1992 – some 15 years after the first game, *Combat*. The last title to be published by Atari Corp. itself came in 1990 and was a conversion of the hugely-successful Atari Games coin-op *Klax*. Steve DeFrisco was responsible for this conversion and we were intrigued to know how difficult it was converting a brand new-arcade game to such ancient hardware. "My challenge was to match the gameplay characteristics as closely to the arcade as possible. It was a given at the start of the project that the graphics would not be as intricate and detailed as the original. The sounds would also have to be simplified to match the capabilities of the 2600. I think the gameplay on the 2600 was more fun than some of the other ports of the game out there, though!" Steve's other favourite game that he produced was *Secret Quest*, billed as the 2600's answer to *Zelda*. "[That game] was fun because of the save game feature and the large maps," Steve enthused. "The biggest challenge was to come up with a system that allowed people to continue their game without any permanent storage on the cart. The save game system had to be done in a way that people couldn't cheat by guessing at game codes. Secondly was to have a large enough map to make the game interesting, and I achieved both pretty well." In 1977, when the 2600 was created, nobody expected it to live on into the Nineties and it probably would have fallen away it wasn't for the release of the 2600 Jr.. We leave it to Steve to sum up why he thinks the 2600 managed to live on so long. "There were just so many fun games written for the 2600. Because it lacked the graphics and sound of more modern systems, gameplay had to be key. While the novelty of playing games on your TV at home was exciting, the gameplay had to be solid in order for system to be successful and Atari definitely capitalised on that." *



» [Atari 2600] Doug Neubauer's *Solaris* was intended as game based on *The Last Starfighter* movie and it looks fantastic.

Special thanks to Steve DeFrisco, David Lubar and the Atari Museum.





海腹川背

The making of Umihara

This fishing-themed platformer might not be a household name, but it's a perennial favourite amongst hardcore importers and the speedrunning community. Nick Thorpe talks to Kiyoshi Sakai to find out just how it came to be…



UMIHARA KAWASE 101

■ This is a platform game which requires you to navigate stages with the aid of an elastic fishing line, which acts as a rope swing, bungee cord and projectile weapon. In order to complete a stage, you must reach a door before the time limit expires.

The creative process is a funny thing. Sometimes it's incredibly transparent – you might be able to see real life influences on a product like *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, or publishers following a major market trend as with the Nineties fighting game boom. On the other hand, sometimes you get creative works whose origins are unfathomable, and the Super Famicom platformer *Umihara Kawase* is a game that most definitely falls into this category.

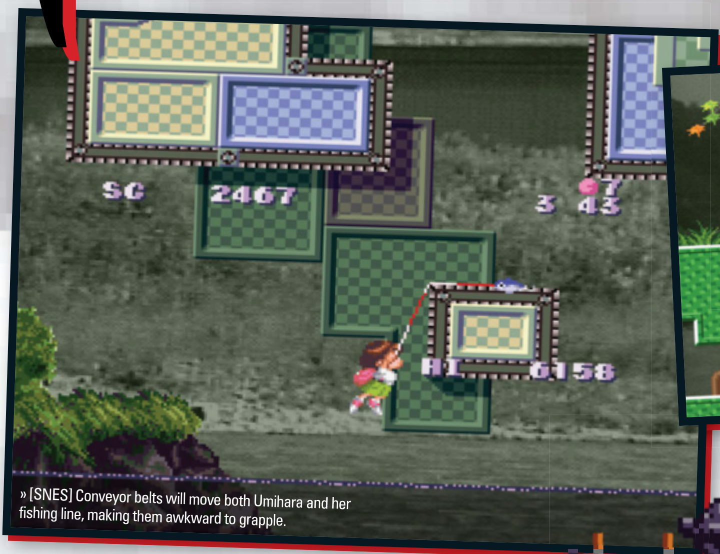
You may not have heard of *Umihara Kawase*, and that's perfectly understandable. The original game was developed by a six-person team at TNN ('Think About Needs Of Notice For Human Being', according to the box) and released in 1994, but only made it as far as the Japanese market. The game wasn't an enormous sales success but it quickly became a cult classic, prized by both Japanese players and import aficionados for its surreal aesthetic and unique gameplay.

You take control of the heroine Umihara Kawase, an ordinary 19-year-old sushi chef named after a popular saying amongst those who share her profession – "Umi no sakana wa hara ni, kawa no sakana wa se ni abura ga notte iru" ("Sea fish are fat in the belly, river fish are fat in the back"). Armed with nothing more than a fishing rod and a backpack, her goal is to get through a series of platform assault courses. However, this is no picnic as her ordinary jumping ability means that many of the platforms are out of reach, requiring her to use her fishing line as a grappling hook. What's more, the giant fishes roaming each area are deadly and will knock our protagonist out with a single hit, and the stages are filled with other hazards including pits, platforms, conveyor belts and deadly spikes.

It's a pretty strange concept and one that doesn't have an obvious inspiration. However, the game's programmer and designer Kiyoshi Sakai apparently did receive some external influence from the world of pop culture. "When I found out one of the famous female singers had a hobby as 'fishing', it hit my brain; so unique," he explains. "Then, I started to create the concept." It was a serendipitous discovery, as the team was already exploring a related concept. "Originally, our team wanted to create a 'wired action game'," Sakai recalls. "Then, we planned the game system, and almost at the same time the above idea hit me, so use 'lure, rubber line and a girl' to start creating the game."

The theme permeated every aspect of the game. Umihara Kawase used a fishing rod, so naturally her enemies were fish – albeit fish that were as large as her, and often capable of walking on land. She's a chef, so platforms were adorned with vegetables as decoration. Naturally, all of this had to take place by water, too. However, in a novel twist for the time, the backgrounds were composed primarily of digital photographs. The contrast of photorealistic sea and river scenes against the pixel art foregrounds is the defining aspect of the game's aesthetic, and we were interested to know why it was chosen. "The background team has two freshmen artists. So, we worried about the quality," Sakai explains. "To decrease their work and keep the quality, we implemented the pictures. Though, the outcome is great, don't you think?"

Kawase



» [SNES] Conveyor belts will move both Umihara and her fishing line, making them awkward to grapple.



» [SNES] If you find a pink backpack laying around, grab it – it's good for an extra life!

The idea of a platform game based around a grappling hook mechanism certainly wasn't a new one – Sakai and his team would doubtless have been aware of *Bionic Commando*, one of the closest points of comparison to *Umihara Kawase*. Still, TNN's game is unique in that the fishing line was elastic and flexible enough to bend around platforms, and there's no possibility of pulling yourself upwards onto a platform from below. Instead, you have to perform acrobatics with the fishing line – swinging, bouncing and more.

It's a unique and technically-impressive game design, making use of the kind of physics simulation that isn't tremendously common on 16-bit consoles. We were curious to know how hard that was to implement, and in particular if hardware limitations were a major problem for Sakai and the TNN team – the game is prone to slowdown during sequences involving complex interactions. "Not because of the Super Famicom, but fishing line's bend is the most difficult point in the game," he responds when asked about the game's technical challenges. We'd expected that, but the scale of the challenge and the solution the team resorted to is a surprise. "It is easy to show 'looks bent', but when we studied a rare case bug, the source had a bug. So, we started from scratch again."

海腹川背

Playing The Anglers

Fishing is a surprisingly popular activity amongst videogame heroes – here are five of our favourite pixellated piscators…

JEFFRY MCWILD

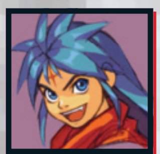
VIRTUA FIGHTER



■ While this pancratium practitioner faces off against fearsome foes in the *Virtua Fighter* games, none of them compare to his lifelong rival – the Satan Shark. In fact, his primary motivation to fight is to win prize money with which he can buy equipment to track down this marine menace.

RYU

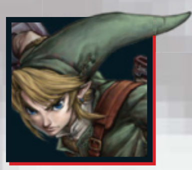
BREATH OF FIRE



■ While no two *Breath Of Fire* protagonists are the same person, they've always got a few common traits – the blue hair, the draconic heritage, and unusually a proficiency for fishing. This is always a key part of each game, so be sure to master it!

LINK

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA



■ The hero of Hyrule might not be the most enthusiastic fisherman on this list, but he's certainly dabbled in it for at least a couple of decades. He first grabbed a rod in *The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening*, and brought it back during many of his 3D adventures.

BIG THE CAT

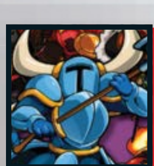
SONIC ADVENTURE



■ There are those who think that Big's fishing sections in *Sonic Adventure* are the worst part of the game. If you trace their family trees, you'll learn that they are all descendents of the king of Planet Wrong, an off-world colony formed by people with a talent for being incorrect.

SHOVEL KNIGHT

SHOVEL KNIGHT



■ When he's not smacking people with digging implements, the star of one of our favourite retro-inspired games likes to drop a lure down bottomless pits to see what he can catch. Occasionally, he gets sheet music. *Shovel Knight* lives in a strange kingdom…

Rather than being an aid, the fishing line was an integral part of the game's challenge. "The very basics of an action game is 'use your technique to break through the difficulties'. So, the difficulties are at this level," Sakai notes. As you worked out how best to take advantage of its physics, advanced techniques became possible. For example, if you have your line attached to a platform above, but can't get up simply by reeling in your line, running away will increase line tension enough to allow for a super jump. If you want to get to a platform below your current position that can't be reached by jumping, plant your lure where you are and make yourself a rope to swing in with.

However, it wasn't just a challenge of manual dexterity. "Some people say the *Umihara Kawase* series only uses controlling techniques or reflexes, but in reality, you need tactics to find out the best path to clear and so on," Sakai confirms. There's a strong puzzle element to the game, as the difficulty is often just as much about figuring out what to do as actually pulling it off. Even the boss stages exhibit this – for example, you might struggle with the first boss until you work out that your fishing rod is ineffective against it and that it will eventually jump off the stage of its own accord if you can survive long enough. If that sounds like a brutally difficult initial boss encounter, it is – and that level of difficulty is sustained throughout the game thanks to an abundance of bottomless pits and our protagonist's characteristic fragility. Just completing the game is a badge of honour, and there's a very good reason that you're given ten lives to start the game. Beating all 49 stages is a true test of your gaming skill too – some levels have multiple exits so you'll have to play through the game more than once to see them all.

Umihara Kawase was released on 23 December 1994, after roughly two years in development, by the software publishing arm of the Japanese broadcaster NHK. As we mentioned earlier it wasn't an overwhelming sales success, but it definitely found passionate fans. Late in 2015 many outlets covered the story of a player known as Wanikun, who had kept his Super Famicom running nearly constantly over 20 years, so as not to lose his saved data to a battery failure. A small, passionate group of English-speaking fans congregate around the website KawaseFan.net, too.

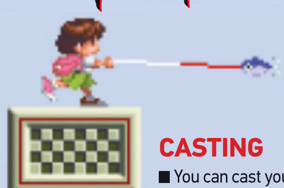
However, one particular group of players really embraced the game – the burgeoning speedrunning scene. Thanks to the game's non-linear nature and the advanced techniques possible with mastery of the fishing line, the game can be completed extraordinarily quickly by experienced speedrunners – times under three minutes are



» [SNES] The only safe place to hide from this boss is under the platform!

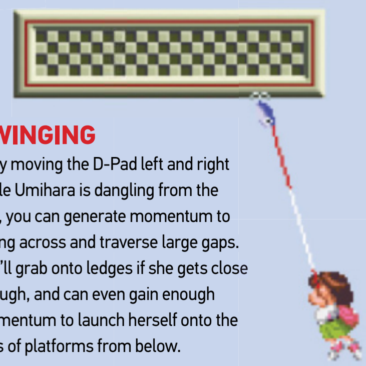
Saltwater Skills

Here's how Umihara Kawase interacts with the world around her…



CASTING

■ You can cast your fishing line in all eight directions available on the SNES D-pad, and your hook will attach to most solid objects and surfaces. Once the line is hooked, it'll bend around any platforms obstructing a direct line from the hook to our heroine.

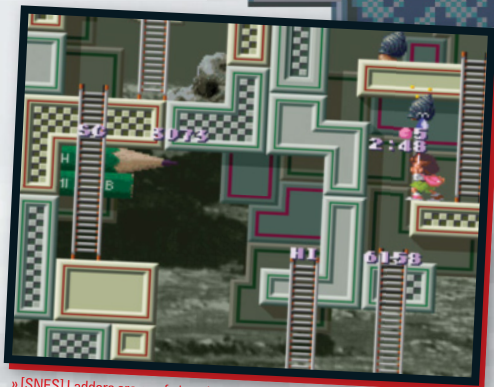


SWINGING

■ By moving the D-Pad left and right while Umihara is dangling from the line, you can generate momentum to swing across and traverse large gaps. She'll grab onto ledges if she gets close enough, and can even gain enough momentum to launch herself onto the tops of platforms from below.

海の魚は腹に、川の魚は背に脂がのっている

"Sea fish are fat in the belly, river fish are fat in the back"



» [SNES] Ladders are a safe but slow method of moving around each stage.

the goal, with the best players capable of bringing completion times to the two-minute mark. It was something that caught Sakai and the TNN team completely by surprise. "For the Steam version, *Umihara Kawase* has internet ranking and clear time save modes. However, the 1994 Super Famicom version does not have those fancy features, but it has a timer counting down to show when the game ceases." Placing the game against a time limit was all it took to generate interest amongst the competitive types, though. In fact, this interest resulted in some wildly unexpected consequences, as Sakai explains: "After the release, players were competing over times, and others created pirated ROMs. So, we have implemented the Time Competition feature from *Umihara Kawase Shun*."

Umihara Kawase's cult speedrunning appeal was ultimately enough to take the game a long way. A PlayStation sequel titled *Umihara Kawase Shun* was released in 1997, adding 3D visuals and some markedly more bizarre hand-drawn character designs, but retaining the same 2D gameplay. An updated rerelease titled *Umihara Kawase Shun Second Edition* followed with new stages in 1999. This game later received a port to the PSP as *Umihara Kawase Portable*, which received a poor reception due to bad physics implementation, and both the SNES original and PlayStation sequel received a much better Nintendo DS conversion under the tongue-twisting title *Umihara Kawase Shun Second Edition Kanzenban*. In 2013, a second sequel titled *Sayonara Umihara Kawase* was released for the 3DS, and the game was ported to PlayStation Vita in 2015. This game featured fully-3D visuals, doing away with the photographic backgrounds of the previous games, and introduced new characters with different abilities in an attempt to make the game less difficult. However, the biggest step for the series was taken in 2014 when the 3DS version was localised for English-speaking audiences as *Yumi's Odd Odyssey* – finally making its Western debut 20 years after the release of the original game.

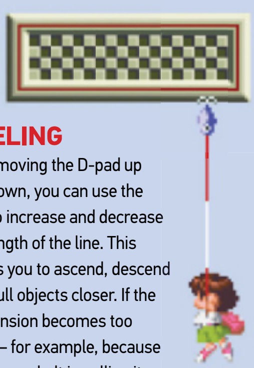
But the original wasn't made available to the West until November 2015, when the trilogy became available worldwide via Steam. The game disappeared the following month as publisher Agatsuma Entertainment was closed, but Degica Games fortunately stepped in to assume publishing duties. While the games still haven't found an enormous audience, glowing user reviews show that they're very highly appreciated by the players that have taken a chance on them.

So after more than 20 years, *Umihara Kawase* still retains its cult appeal, and for the dedicated fans that hasn't dulled at all. Why is that? "Because we make the game a very simple action game, and it feels great when you play it," says Sakai. "Thank you very much for your time, and I hope you enjoy my *Umihara Kawase* series!" *



IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** NHK SC
- **» DEVELOPER:** TNN/Studio Saizensen
- **» RELEASED:** 1994
- **» PLATFORM:** SNES
- **» GENRE:** Platform



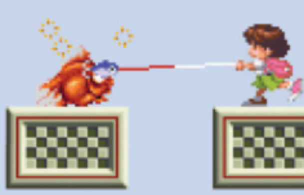
REELING

■ By moving the D-pad up and down, you can use the reel to increase and decrease the length of the line. This allows you to ascend, descend and pull objects closer. If the line tension becomes too great – for example, because a conveyor belt is pulling it but you can't move – your line will snap.

CATCHING

■ If Umihara touches an enemy while she has it hooked, whether she reels it in or simply runs into it, she'll put it into her backpack – effectively killing it and earning you points. Alternatively, you can dispose of enemies simply by dragging them into the cold, deep water for no points.





STUNNING

■ Hitting enemies with your fishing line will stun them. While they're stunned, they're harmless, so you can walk through them without being killed. Stunned enemies can be reeled in, just like other objects.

IMAGIC

Imagic conjured up some of the best games of the Eighties but it couldn't pull a rabbit out the hat when the market crashed, as David Crookes finds out

A dashing-looking Bill Grubb stared directly at television viewers as the documentary cameras rolled. "I want Imagic to be the best damn software company that is available in the marketplace," he said. "I want people to have the opportunity to grow and be challenged and I want to participate in the riches that those things will afford us."

It was 1982 and Bill was taking part in the PBS show, *Enterprise*, at a time when ambition and talk of making truckloads of money was laid bare without a blush. Aged 38 and filmed driving around in his open-top Mercedes, he was introduced by the documentary as the son of a New York cop. More importantly, he was the former vice president of marketing and sales at Atari.

Bill had seen the videogame market grow. It was dominated by three major players: Atari, Mattel and Activision. There was fierce competition. Atari was pushing its VCS console and Mattel was banking heavily on Intellivision. But it was Activision which turned Bill's head. Shortly after leaving Atari at the beginning of 1981 to set up a company called New West Marketing, he had carried out some work for the developer and he was impressed by Activision's success.

Crucially, Bill noted that the company was making a lot of money. It had been valued at $66 million just two years after forming in 1979 and Bill decided that he wanted a slice of the action. Meanwhile, a 32-year-old games designer called Dennis Koble was itching to leave Atari and since the pair knew each other, they began to talk about their burning desire to make their own mark on the videogame industry.

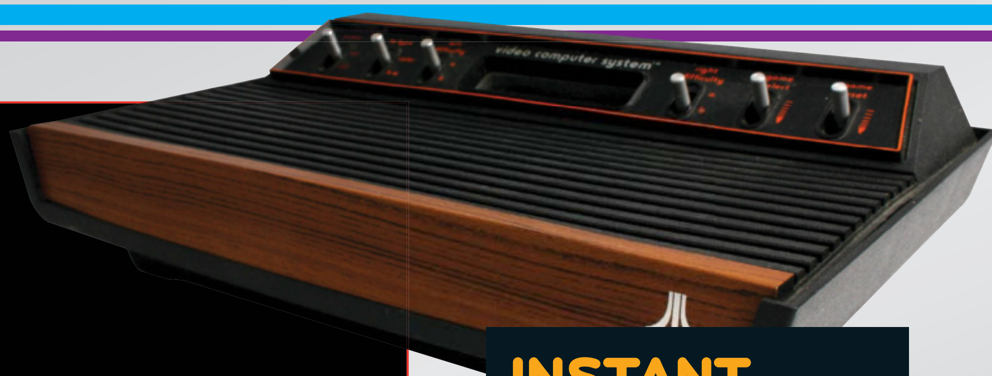
They were not alone in having such thoughts. Brian Dougherty, a 26-year-old games designer and engineer, and Jim Goldberger, a 28-year-old former marketing analyst, both from Mattel, wanted to be independent too. They had considered going at it alone in developing third-party titles for the Intellivision. Instead, they began talking to Bill and Dennis and the four realised they had to the potential to create a gaming powerhouse.

Fully motivated, Bill got on with the task of raising money to get the new venture off the ground and it wasn't long before five others were attracted to join the founding team. Bob Smith, Mark Bradley, Rob Fulop, Dave Durran and Gary Kato had become disillusioned



» [Atari 2600] *Demon Attack* was Imagic's biggest-selling game and it even found its way to the T1-99/4A.







» [Atari 2600] *Atlantis II* was created to decide the top four winners of a high-score competition.

with the salaries they were earning at Atari and Mattel. With Bill having raised $2 million, Imagic Corporation began life on 17 July 1981.

The company resided in Los Gatos, California. It was literally a stone's throw from Atari's first office and it was part of the then-burgeoning Silicon Valley.

"We were riding on the coattails of Activision," says Rob. "Bill had the business connections and the access to capital and he knew people at Mattel. His vision was to start a company which would make games not only for Atari but for Intellivision and be the first company to go cross-platform. Limiting ourselves to Atari, like Activision, just didn't make sense."

Imagic began to come up with ideas for games and the process of pitching was the same in each case. "We would develop one screen and one level of a game which would take around two months," Rob says, admitting it was quite challenging on the Atari to develop a good, strong look for a game. "If it worked



» [Intellivision] In *Tropical Trouble*, Clarence was tasked with looking for Doris after being shipwrecked on an island.

"It was hard to make a game like a movie with the hardware we had"

Rob Fulop

we'd move on towards a complete game which would take around six months to develop. Then, we'd maybe spend another month polishing it and making the PAL version, adjusting the timing and the scan lines."

Rob's first title was *Demon Attack* for the Atari 2600 and it took him nine months to create. It was a fixed shooter with strong echoes of the space-based games at the time. "*Space Invaders* was the first and there was this whole bunch of games like *Galaxian* and *Phoenix* where the monsters would peel off and come down and fly at you," he says. "That was where *Demon Attack* came from but there were about five arcade games with the same basic mechanic."

While he was getting on with that, other developers had been working on their games, the aim being to have titles available throughout the year. The company split itself into two divisions to enable it to better make games for the two main consoles. "We had one for Atari games and one for Mattel," explains Rob. "They were basically two different design centres." Those who worked on the Atari games tended to make the projects entirely their own. "We'd make the games by ourselves," Rob continues, "whereas with Mattel games it was more of a team-based approach."

Demon Attack was ready for release a couple of months into 1982 and it formed the first wave of ▶

INSTANT EXPERT

- **Imagic was founded in 1981 by former employees of Atari and Mattel.**
- It was pronounced 'im-agic', not 'i-magic'.
- **Atari was so angry that Rob Fulop had left to go to Imagic, it delved into his code for *Missile Command* and took out his initials.**
- Its bestselling games included the likes of *Demon Attack* and *Atlantis*.
- **Those titles were the only third-party releases for the Odyssey² in the US.**
- Atari felt *Demon Attack* looked too similar to *Phoenix* and sued.
- **Imagic ran a lot of competitions – the winner of a contest for *Riddle Of The Sphinx* was written in real Egyptian hieroglyphics on a 12-foot scroll.**
- *Cosmic Ark* is said to be the first console game sequel (following up *Atlantis*).
- **Adverts starred a cast of aliens, including Zytar, who was crazy for *Atlantis*.**
- Imagic was dealing with 350 letters from gamers each week.
- **The company was hoping for a public flotation but it never happened.**
- Imagic handed developers a two-percent royalty on their games.
- **Children would test the games with Imagic watching through a one-way mirror.**
- Rob Fulop says around half the games that were started were not finished.
- **The North American videogame crash of 1983 effectively killed Imagic.**

TIMELINE

1981
- Bill Grubb resigns from Atari.
- Bill and eight others found Imagic.
- Imagic hires the ad agency Keye/Donna/Pearlstein.

1982
- Imagic's first wave of games, including *Demon Attack*, is launched.
- Imagic looks to spend $10 million on advertising.
- Atari sues over similarities between *Demon Attack* and *Phoenix*.
- Stock in many gaming companies, including Mattel, falls sharply.

1983
- The Atari suit is settled.
- Imagic releases games such as *Nova Blast*, *Fathom* and *Safecracker*.
- Sales of Imagic games top $75 million.
- Imagic feels the pinch of a down-turning gaming market.
- The company lays off 40 of its 170 employees

1984
- Many developers leave Imagic, which has stopped making Intellivision games
- Imagic attends the CES in Las Vegas.
- Imagic's last games – *Chopper Hunt*, *Tournament Tennis* and *Wing War* – are published.

1985
- No news comes from Imagic's offices.

1986
- Imagic formally closes and Activision grabs the rights for many of its games.



▶ Imagic's videogames. The company had gone on a recruitment drive and it was attracting scores of young talent, frightening Atari which was beginning to suffer something of a brain drain. "It wasn't that hard to round up people to work at Imagic," Rob asserts. "People made a average salary from Atari but at Imagic we were earning royalties and we got our names on the games. There was a time when it was thought putting the name of the inventor on the game was absurd and they wouldn't consider doing that at Atari."

Imagic's staff was proving to be special, coming up with innovative concepts. The maze-like educational game, *Microsurgeon*, for the Intellivision, for example, was programmed by Richard Levine with audio by Dave Durran and it was highly original, taking place inside the human body and asking players to navigate a probe to administer life-saving drugs to patients. Alan Smith made *Dracula* with help from artist Wilfredo Aguilar who injected lots of colourful street-like backgrounds.



» [Atari 2600] *Fathom* had gamers assuming the role of a dolphin and a gull in a colourful and gentle adventure.

> **"Our games looked better than other games. They were sparkly and cool"**
> Rob Fulop

A good number of games looked and sounded familiar. *Beauty And The Beast* was created by Wendell Brown for the Intellivision and it not only tapped into a recognised name but it had strong echoes of *Donkey Kong*. Yet Imagic stopped short of snapping up the rights to arcade games or titles based on movies. "We didn't create licensed games because they would have cost too much money and it was hard to make a game like a movie with the hardware we had," Rob says.

In truth, Imagic didn't need to splash the cash on licences. Its games were flying off the shelves and achieving great reviews. One of Imagic's specialities was putting a lot of effort into the graphics. "The big thing that Imagic did differently to Atari was hire separate artists for the games to create the visuals and invent the screens," says Rob. "That was Imagic's strength because our games looked better than other games at the time. They were sparkly and cool and that's because the artist would try and figure out the perfect colour combinations and the best graphics possible with the limited hardware to make these things pop out."

Making the difference was Michael Becker, a former creative director for an ad agency who had applied for a job as Imagic's art director in 1982. He was joined

DEFINING GAMES



DEMON ATTACK

■ This drew inspiration from the glut of space shooters which proliferated during the earlier years of gaming. While that landed it in legal hot water – Atari sued due to its similarity with *Phoenix* – this game went on to sell more than two million copies on the Atari 2600 alone. Designed by Rob Fulop, the game was blessed with colourful, graphics and it had a varied selection of enemies furnished with different weapons. You needed the extra lives gained by surviving the attack waves, especially when aliens began splitting in two…



ATLANTIS

■ With *Atlantis*, Imagic cemented its reputation as a talented third-party developer. It put you in control of three gun turrets, with the aim being to fire at the overhead Gorgon enemy ships before they got close enough to take out your defence and attack the city. Gaining 10,000 points would see you regain a turret but it became a battle of wits as the ships flew ever faster and you tried to time your shots. It was great fun, with stark echoes of *Missile Command* and it made its way over to other machines including the Intellivision, Commodore VIC-20, Odyssey² and the Atari 8-bits.



» [Atari 2600] Dennis Koble persuaded Rob Fulop to incorporate the survivors of *Atlantis* into *Cosmic Ark*.

by Wilfredo and they produced art on an Atari 800, although their approach to the 2600 and Intellivision differed. For the former, they tended to allow the graphics to stand out by having black backgrounds but they would make use of the greater colour capabilities of the Intellivision to produce more vibrant-looking games.

This helped Imagic's games to become popular but the company's knack of being in tune with gamers extended even further – right down to the way the company identified games for a particular system. Atari games had the title in red while Intellivision had it in blue. All games were placed in shiny boxes, though, and this became an identifier of Imagic's games. To further distinguish its games, Michael oversaw the artwork which would be placed on the box fronts and he used a mix of models and printed materials to achieve results on games such as *Atlantis* and *Dragonfire* that were certain to be picked off the shelves.

Within months of coming to life, Imagic had taken on the high-flying advertising agency Keye/Donna/Pearlstein in a deal worth more than $1 million. Imagic meant business from the start and it knew that by cultivating a brand, it could maximise the dollar. "We knew that games were very profitable," says Rob. "The cartridges which ran the games would cost $4 or so dollars each but they'd sell for more than $30 in the stores."

Unshackled from the hardware business – "Atari was selling games like crazy but it was also losing money mainly because it was producing the hardware too," says Rob – Imagic was able to grow very fast. By the end of its first full year in business it had grown to 86 employees. Being based in Silicon Valley allowed it to attract some of the best programmers around. They – and the company – were determined to make the best games they could.



THE NUMB THUMB CLUB

For just $3 a year, gamers could become members of Imagic's Numb Thumb Club. This would gain them a poster, a membership card and a subscription to a newsletter called the *Numb Thumb News* which ran for only two issues.

Edited by the fictional Armand Hans III, the publication included information on forthcoming releases for the Atari 2600, Atari 400 and 800, Intellivision and Odyssey². It also printed the names and high scores of the top-ranking players along with lots of tips, although the first issue contained the achievements of Imagic's own staff.

The second issue introduced the Experts Club which offered decals, T-shirts and jackets to the best gamers and it was another way to keep players loyal to Imagic. Indeed, Imagic tried many ways to get people buying its titles: gamers snapping up *No Escape!* were able to claim a free Zircon joystick, said to be worth $15.95.



DRAGONFIRE

■ Although *Dragonfire* consisted of the same two screens for every level, they were nevertheless challenging. In the first instance, you were expected to duck and jump your way past fireballs and in the second, you darted around the screen, collecting treasures and hoping the dragon didn't catch you. This, of course, proved repetitive over time but earning the highest possible score while guarding your seven lives was still quite addictive, especially when you began to employ some tactics. If nothing else, play the game to see the marvellous dragon – an amazing feat by the artist.



COSMIC ARK

■ Billed as a sequel to *Atlantis* – in the sense that you were dealing with the previous game's survivors after they had shot off in their spaceship – *Cosmic Ark* had you shooting away meteors by firing shots in their oncoming direction. It was similar in play to Game-A-Tron's *Space Zap* and it preceded a second stage in which you sent a ship to the planet's surface in order to collect lifeforms. This part was the flesh on the bones that elevated the game and you'd nervously keep an eye on the time while avoiding lasers in order to perform a successful pickup.



NO ESCAPE!

■ This game is often overlooked, and yet, with hindsight, it was both imaginative and well structured. Instead of firing directly at the enemy, you looked to hit bricks on the roof in the hope that they would clatter into your foes instead. The twist came when you did hit an enemy – rather than disappear, they would multiply into two, making your task that much harder. *No Escape!* was also a game that came into its own the longer you played. The enemies would begin to fire back and their moves became less predictable. It was one of 1983's finest Atari 2600 games.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

ROB FULOP



■ Rob designed three original Philips CD-i titles and he founded PF Magic which led the design of the world's first digital pets, Dogz and Catz. He sold PF to Mattel in 2000 and joined Playfirst as a senior game designer before working with Videobrain and Zynga. He currently works as the design director for Hands On Media and he joined the indie rock band Bourbon Therapy in California as keyboardist in 2015.

DENNIS KOBLE

■ Dennis Koble became the director of software at Electronic Arts, leaving to become the vice president of technology at Universal Studios. After a three-year spell as the COO of Mineshaft Entertainment, he became the owner of Illogical Software, working as a consultant to the videogame industry.

BRIAN DOUGHERTY

■ Brian Dougherty founded Berkeley Software in 1983 which he ran until 1995, at which point he founded Wink Communications and developed an interactive television system used by 10 million people. After founding AirSet, a web and mobile software developer, he became a private investor.

JIM GOLDBERGER

■ Jim was the vice president of marketing at Imagic, officially leaving the company in January 1985. Two years later, he became the vice president of business development at Geoworks, took the same role at the hardware manufacturer Canesta and became the director of business development at Immersion, a maker of tactile touchscreens. After working as vice president of sales for Skytide, he became a senior director of Strategic Business Development at Citrix.

BILL GRUBB

■ Bill became the CEO and president of The Complete PC between 1987 and 1993, leaving to assume the same role at the Interactive Cable Television Company (ICTV). He headed up Millennia Software for around 18 months from March 1995 at and then became CEO/President of Toolz for eight months. Today, he co-owns Grubb Enterprises, which works in real estate.

To put the titles through their paces, Imagic had its own testing centre that was unafraid of hiring children to give their honest opinions. This also helped Imagic to be in tune with young trends. The company went wherever the money was, porting games to the Atari 400 and 800 computers as well as the Odyssey². Bill's desire was to ready the company for a stock market flotation and in 1982 he was sure that it would be just as attractive to investors as it was to developers and gamers.

The games remained the number-one priority, though. Rob made *Cosmic Ark* which was sold as the sequel to Atlantis and it became widely regarded as the first follow-up for a console game. It involved piloting a ship, destroying meteors and launching a shuttle to the surface of a planet before returning to the ship. Once the fuel ran out, the game would end and the idea was to reach as many planets as possible.

Cosmic Ark was another big-seller although it was *Demon Attack* which was earning the plaudits, having become Imagic's bestselling game and one of the top ten bestsellers in America. Unfortunately, trouble wasn't too far away and nine months after its release, *Demon Attack* had attracted the attentions of Atari's lawyers.

Atari, which had the exclusive rights to produce *Phoenix* for the home market, felt that Imagic had ripped off its game. It filed a copyright infringement suit in the



» [Atari 2600] *Riddle Of The Sphinx* was a treacherous trek through the desert in the hunt for treasure.

> **"Nobody left Atari with anything, only what was in their heads"**
> Rob Fulop

Federal District Court in San Francisco and accompanied it with a charge of unfair competition. It sought damages and an injunction against the sale of *Demon Attack*.

"It was big company politics," says Rob, who also dismisses any suggestion that former employees had taken trade secrets from Atari which had allowed them to make their games. "That was spurious because nobody left Atari with anything, only what was in their heads," he says. Rob believes Atari was worried about growing competition in the market. "Lots of games were flooding the market and Atari was not making as much profit," Rob says. "Atari was a public company and shareholders were likely demanding a rethink."

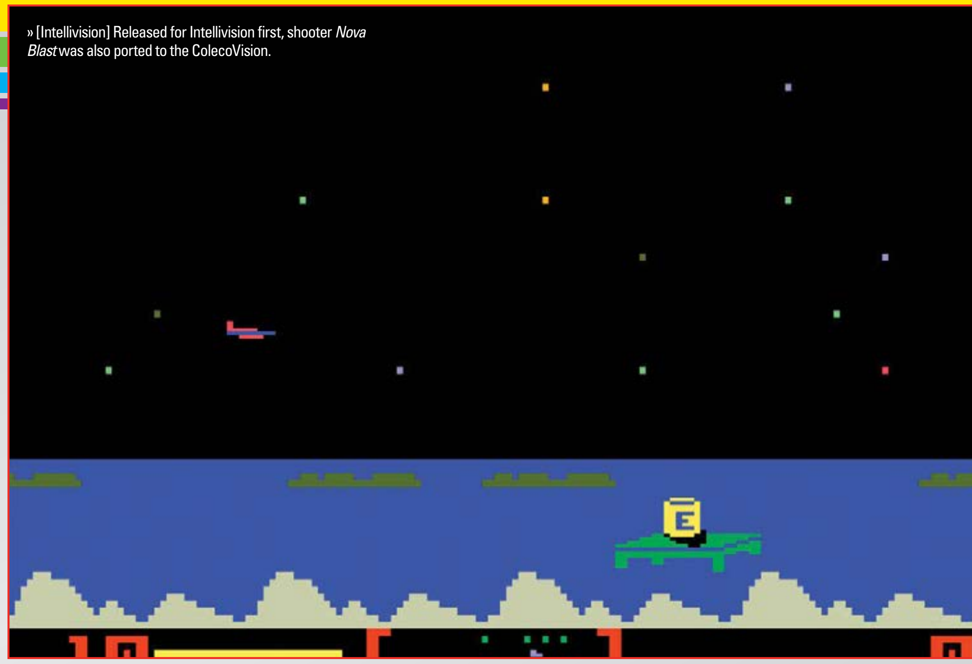
Bruce L Davis, the vice president for legal affairs at Imagic, told the New York Times that the lawsuit wouldn't have a major effect on the company's own stock offering, although it had to amend the prospectus to include mention of it. In the end, the issue was dealt with swiftly. A settlement was reached in January 1983 and while the terms were not disclosed, Imagic said it would continue to sell its version of the game.

It was a time to celebrate – Imagic had shipped $50 million worth of games in 1982 which also included Bob Smith's *Riddle Of The Sphinx*, *Star Voyager*, *Trick Shot*, and *Fire Fighter*. Imagic was looking to achieve sales of $75 million by the end of the tax year and with great sales for *Atlantis* and Imagic weathering a storm which had seen some of its competitors falter, everything was on course for it to become the first public company born out of the videogame explosion. Even so, there was scepticism that the industry was going to be short-lived.





» [Atari 2600] Imagic made more space shooters than any other genre – *Laser Gates* was a splendid side-scroller.



» [Intellivision] Released for Intellivision first, shooter *Nova Blast* was also ported to the ColecoVision.

Everything was scaling up. "The teams were bigger and typically they weren't as experienced," says Rob. "There was a lot more discussion and the managers wanted to get involved. Individuality was being lost and design cycles were becoming shorter." Imagic had a lot of people on the payroll and all of the expenses that came with such large numbers each month.

It was also splashing the cash on advertising. It had plans to spend $10 million during sporting events in the first half of 1983, promoting its games on the major networks, ABC and NBC, with the tagline "created by experts for experts". Print adverts asked, "So you think you're pretty good?" and children became familiar with Imagic's chairman – or at least the fictionalised chairman, Armand Hans III and his intergalactic hoodlums that were used in Imagic's promotions.

Solar Storm, *Moonsweeper* and *Laser Gates* were released in 1983. The latter game had been brought from VentureVision by Dan Oliver when that company went bankrupt. The ideas were just a strong in this second full year of trading: *No Escape!* for the 2600 drew on the story of Jason and the Golden Fleece and it was akin to a reverse *Breakout* and shooter *Nova Blast* continued Imagic's love of all things space, yet it proved to be a poor man's *Defender*.

In August, Rob created, *Fathom*, his last game for Imagic. It was promoted with a contest that invited gamers to count the number of tridents hidden on the back of the box and on the poster. It was a decent, game although for Rob the long-lasting memory of not being get the dolphin to jump out of the water seamlessly enough continues to jar. Such worries paled in light of what was about to happen next…

As the months went by, hopes of the public offering disappeared and 1983 became the year of the videogame crash. There was little Imagic could have done. Although Rob had refused to create a sequel to *Demon Attack*, with Imagic believing it would have been an instant hit, producing that game wouldn't have made the situation much better. "The company had hit a wall," says Rob. "The industry was falling part."

In September 1983, 40 of its 170 employees had to be laid off. Bill ended up calling 1983 "the year of humility" for gaming and the New York Times reported company spokesman Margaret Davis saying Imagic was agreeing to sell off its inventory to raise money.

Rob had left in 1983, taking an unpublished game called *Cubicolor* with him. It took him a while to adjust to life outside the company (he ended up making one a 2600 game called *Actionauts*) but he knew it was the end. "We were also seeing a rise in computers such as the C64, which was selling games on disk. There was no cartridge market which was really the bulk of the profit for Imagic and because all of this was before the Nintendo release, there was a grey dead zone for gaming where there was no money to be made."

In its last throes, Imagic published ANALOG Software's *Chopper Hunt* which was a retooling of *Buried Buck$*, D&L Research's *Tournament Tennis* and its own action game, *Wing War*, but it was a rough patch with no smooth end in sight and the company was liquidated in 1986. A search in the California business register shows Imagic is currently on record in a state of 'Surrender' although Activision now has the rights to the company's games.

"It was still a wonderful time," says Rob. "We were this bunch of young adults, and we'd work late on a Friday and go out for pizza. It was like a startup now with that kind of fun culture with lots of friend hanging out together, making games our lives." *

THE DNA OF IMAGIC



SUPERB GRAPHICS

■ It helped a lot that Imagic had its own dedicated artists who worked hard to produce graphically-impressive games on the latter-day consoles. Since Imagic didn't pursue licences, it was important that its games stood out on their own for their quality.



STRONG DESIGN

■ Rob Fulop says Imagic had a culture of craftsmanship, with games remaining in development until the coders were happy with them. It meant the company gained a reputation for producing polished titles that were unafraid to push the boundaries of the time.



ATARI HERITAGE

■ Imagic enticed a number of disgruntled Atari employees to jump ship. There was a determination among the team to show their former bosses what they had lost. The experience gained from working at Atari ensured they had the know-how to create third-party games for the 2600.



MULTI-PLATFORM

■ Imagic did not dedicate all of its time to producing games for one console. The Atari 2600 may have been important but so were the likes of Intellivision and Odyssey². Many games were ported to other machines, often with tweaks, widening the potential audience for Imagic's games.



SHINY CASES

■ Gamers would know they were playing an Imagic game from silver, handled cases in which the carts would be sold. Imagic also retailed its games at $31.95 which was slightly more than its rivals. Rather than put people off, it appeared to reinforce the mantra, 'you get what you pay for'.



MARKETING

■ Imagic played a blinder when it came to promotions but that was no surprise – cofounder Bill Grubb was an marketing whizz. Millions of dollars were poured into pushing Imagic's games and the company even created a fictional board of virtual characters, all helping to cement Imagic's position.

Minority Report

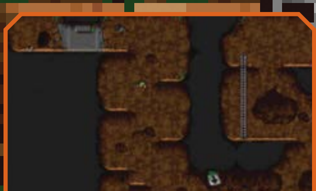
INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED



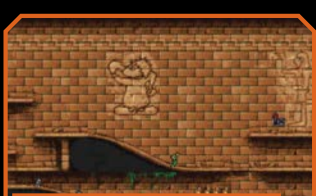
AMIGA CD32

This CD-based system may well have been the last straw for Commodore, but there's still a heck of a lot of good to be found on it. Kim Justice is here to give you the lowdown on these obscure gems





» [CD32] Ben does these really fancy somersaults, but he's about to miss his mark here. Broken legs are just another part of Ben's job.



» [CD32] Benefactor has a lot of references to other Psygnosis games. This level pays a great tribute to its main influence, *Lemmings*.



» [CD32] This could be another reference… an insta-death wall slowly being pushed towards you, straight out of *Shadow Of The Beast II*.

BENEFACTOR

■ DEVELOPER: **DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE** ■ YEAR: **1994**

■ Once upon a time, Digital Illusions CE (DICE) was just a bunch of demo scene kids, hosting raves and pushing out trainers, now it's a part of the EA empire and one of the biggest developers in the world. But somewhere in the middle, it made its bones as a serious and very celebrated studio on the Amiga. While it's mostly famous for the likes of *Pinball Illusions*, that wasn't all it did – *Benefactor*, a CD32 and A1200 release, is one of DICE's greatest ever titles and the only one it did for publishers Psygnosis. Sadly, and perhaps due to Psygnosis pulling out of the 16-bit market totally early in the next year, *Benefactor* never received the great console port it deserved that would have surely made it a much more famous title.

The best way to describe *Benefactor* is as a cross between subgenres. It's a puzzle platformer where you, the suitably-named Ben E. Factor, have to guide *Lemming*-esque Merry Men to the exit that controls like a cinematic platformer in the vein of *Another World*. And it's all miniaturised, with lots of the play area visible at all times. Imagine if *Flashback* was made into a board game – that's what *Benefactor* looks like. You run, you roll, you grab ledges, you pick up little people and make sure that they don't die, saving them from all kinds of traps along the way. You don't have a whole lot of offensive options either, so playing the game's all about evading the same traps and monsters, and negotiating jumping sequences and timing-based puzzles.

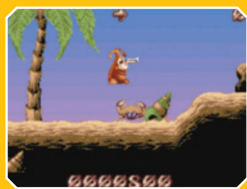
After all, you're not a superhero – just a benefactor. You merely help out.

You might well curse this from time to time, as this game is famous for its difficulty. It doesn't take too long for *Benefactor*'s levels to offer a severe challenge – fortunately there's no time limit and unlimited continues, as they can leave you scratching your head for hours. But as in any great puzzle game, the solution will eventually hit you – maybe it's something that was right in front of your eyes all the time, or maybe it's something that is truly fiendish… either way, *Benefactor* never gets boring, and the game's 60 levels will take you a long time to finish.

Benefactor is a very modern game – it's something you could almost imagine

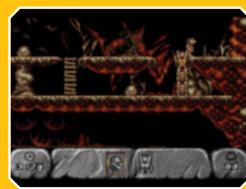
IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY…

PUGGSY
AMIGA



■ This is a puzzle platformer in a slightly similar vein to *Benefactor*, and it's also published by Psygnosis. This grab-things-to-do-things game is very cutesy and honestly a slightly worse game in every possible way, but the little orange space-hopper type thing does have his fans.

THE HUMANS
AMIGA



■ It would be a bit too obvious to put *Lemmings* here, so why not have a look at another game that's inspired by those green-haired wonders? *The Humans* is a fairly well-received and more straightforward puzzler, where cavemen with varying abilities need to get from A to B with your help.

FLASHBACK
VARIOUS



■ The cinematic platformer plays a big part in *Benefactor*'s development too, and it's hard to look past this one – ol' Ben even has Conrad's jacket. One of the undisputed classics of the genre, with many ports to choose from – if you've not played it, the Mega Drive one is your best bet.

being released right now and gaining a lot of praise. The miniaturised graphical style is lovely, the difficulty challenging but not unfair, it's a great hybrid between several famous titles, and there's lots of neat touches – such as 'evil' Merry Men who are only evil because they dumbly walk forward like *Lemmings* and into death unless you save them with a coat of paint that turns them good. As a game, *Benefactor* takes all of these things and combines them brilliantly, and effortlessly – you don't see the joins, and you're only focused on what you have to do… of course, the way that you do it might take a while to figure out. A sadly forgotten, but brilliant, game from a famous developer, *Benefactor* is an essential pick-up for your CD32.

IN DEPTH



APEMAN
■ This hulking gorilla is one of many monsters that pollute this game. If our hero gets in this fella's way, he's likely to wake up the following morning with a very sore head.

I GOT THE KEY…
■ It may not look it from the screenshot, but the yellow line is a revolving key. Unsurprisingly, it is essential to pick up these keys if you want to actually get anywhere.

LITTLE CREATURES
■ More often than not, the Merry Men will be trapped behind doors. Once they're out, they'll usually help you beat the level – or thwart you if they're not coloured in.

OCEAN SIZE
■ Water is a common (and deadly) hazard for both Ben and the Merry Men – if they touch it, they're dead. All it takes is for one Lem… Merry Man to drop in there, and everything's ruined.

Minority Report

BANSHEE

■ PUBLISHER: **CORE DESIGN** ■ YEAR: **1994**

■ Another title that came too late for true recognition, *Banshee* is one of the finest shooters on the Amiga. A steampunk-tinged vertical shoot-'em-up with a ridiculous plot that involves hungry aliens invading Earth and killing your dad because he refused to invent a microwave oven, *Banshee* takes this somewhat novel premise and has its way with it – highly immersive levels of serious fun.

It's a remarkably pretty shooter, especially when you get into the town and find yourself confronted with main drags, churches and factories out of an alternative past – not to mention the graveyards filled with zombies and magnificent men in their flying machines, all of whom want to kill you, and all because they couldn't heat up a microwaveable cheeseburger. You can return the favour with plenty of firepower, and the *Banshee* itself can take a pretty good pounding before sputtering out of existence – but it's definitely a game that will test even the most experienced of shooter fans, if only through sheer attrition – the levels are very long indeed.

There's many a strange touch in *Banshee,* also – from a code that'll allow you to bring death to polar bears and fishermen, who stupidly thought that a massive dogfight was a good time to go out and catch some carp, to people who'll try and kill you with exploding igloos and many a gigantic boss, it never stops being interesting and packed with energy. Sadly, the CD32 version doesn't even have music when compared to the A1200 edition, which is odd for something that was supposed to be predominantly a CD32 title – but no matter where you find it, the game's utterly worth it.



» [CD32] Blood on the rocks, ain't no surprise… a typically violent scene from the game, with red soldier-spew flying everywhere.



» [CD32] Squint and you might possibly be able to make out Miley Cyrus straddling atop this wrecking ball.



» [CD32] If you want to harden up your baby? Take them out in the pram for a stroll as a war's going on.

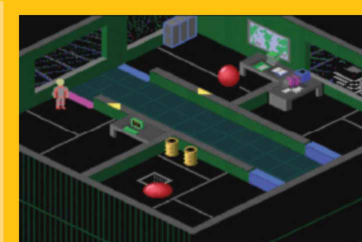
MORE GAMES TO PLAY



» THE CLUE!

■ DEVELOPER: **NEO SOFTWARE**
■ YEAR: **1994**

■ A sordid tale of cat burglary and criminal activity in Fifties London, *The Clue* on the CD32 benefits greatly from a lack of the extreme floppy disk swapping that essentially killed the game on the A1200. It might lack a little in English, but there's not many point-and-click games that'll have you planning out daring midnight heists and talking in such a shifty way with potential partners. It's actually a remake of *They Stole A Million.*



» D/GENERATION

■ DEVELOPER: **ABERSOFT**
■ YEAR: **1993**

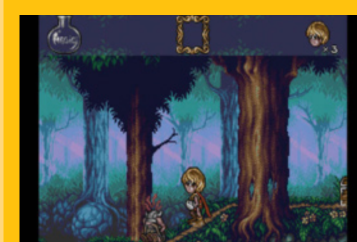
■ A very solid port of a 1991 game, with controls that are, for a change, designed around the CD32's pad… this atmospheric, sci-fi-tastic isometric adventure will leave your head pounding and the back of your neck bristling, and it plays great here. Can you match wits with evil compound philosopher Jean-Luc Derrida, and avoid his many creations? The CD32 version is definitely the best way to find out.



» DISPOSABLE HERO

■ DEVELOPER: **BOYS WITHOUT BRAINS**
■ YEAR: **1994**

■ This is a horizontal shooter with a particularly unique take on power-ups – you have to find blueprints in order to successfully upgrade your ship. It's certainly a rush to explore every nook and cranny of the scrolling stages, whilst enemies come bounding at you thick and fast. It's an interesting and very worthwhile riff on typical intergalactic blasting, with the usual solid Gremlin presentation. This comes highly recommended.



» FLINK

■ DEVELOPER: **PSYGNOSIS**
■ YEAR: **1994**

■ With no A1200 version to speak of, the CD32 is the best way to play this cute and magical platformer from the makers of *Lionheart*. The controls can be a little fiddly and it might not stand out a lot from other platformers, but it does what it does very well and hoo-boy does it look good. Ignored at a time when cute platformers were not in vogue, Flink's held up well now that we're all that little bit older and not so edgy.

SHADOW FIGHTER

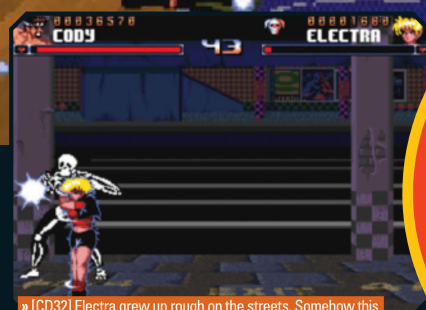
■ DEVELOPER: **N.A.P.S.** ■ YEAR: **1994**

■ A common theme with a lot of these games is that they all came out too late on a platform that was dying out, and they weren't able to break out of it in time. *Shadow Fighter* is possibly the best fighting game on the Amiga, let alone the CD32. It's some of the best fun you can have with a single-button fighter – alas, it came out right at the end of 1994, by which time the CD32 was basically all but dead. Still, this game rages against the grave with the fists of a thousand men, and the result is an absolute corker on the cobblestones.

Even with a single button, *Shadow Fighter* is a very responsive fighter that's chock-full of moves, most of which do make sense, and all of which have a delightful crunch to them. The graphics are nice, too – a great deal better than any of the attempts to put *Street Fighter II* itself on the Amiga, add in a decent cast of fighters and some cracking music, and you've got a solid fighting game that makes you forget the limitations of the Amiga in this department. The one shame is that the game would have been better if it had made use of the other buttons on the CD32 pad. Irregardless, it's still the best one-button fighter on the Amiga – for our money, it's a great deal better than the slightly more famous but less impactful *Body Blows*.



» [CD32] *Shaq-Fu* isn't the only fighting game that takes inspiration from the b-ball courts. Slamdunk would pound ol' Kazaam into dust.



» [CD32] Electra grew up rough on the streets. Somehow this gave her the ability to spin around and electrocute people.

> **"Even with a single button, Shadow Fighter is a very responsive fighter"**

RETRO STINKER

» DANGEROUS STREETS

■ DEVELOPER: **FLAIR SOFTWARE** ■ YEAR: **1994**

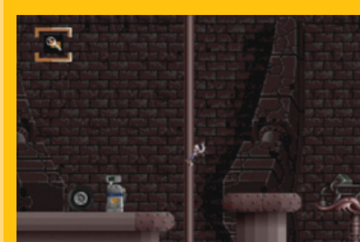
■ Everything that *Shadow Fighter* was, this wasn't – a hideous excuse for a beat-'em-up that was, unbelievably, chosen to be the CD32's pack-in title. Little wonder then that the system failed so hard.



» PREMIERE

■ DEVELOPER: **THE 8TH DAY**
■ YEAR: **1994**

■ This unsuccessful platformer stands out on the CD32 due to the small library, but it has some interesting things about it – you play as a movie director, avoiding tumbleweeds and cowboys and the like, and you can hop to a second plane at almost any point. This dual-plane action – a la *Guardian Heroes* – certainly makes the game feel kind of different. Presentation is lacking, but a solid platformer nonetheless.



» IMPOSSIBLE MISSION: 2025

■ DEVELOPER: **MICROPROSE UK**
■ YEAR: **1994**

■ Unlike most games that went from the A1200 to the CD32, this update of the C64 classic makes plenty of additions – new music, big levels and lots of FMV. The game itself is a more obviously grim and Giger-influenced take on the game, but with the same acrobatics, robots and desperate searching through terminals that made the original so great – and yes, the classic voices are back.



» LIBERATION: CAPTIVE 2

■ DEVELOPER: **BYTE ENGINEERS**
■ YEAR: **1994**

■ If you enjoy the dungeon-crawling likes of *Hired Guns*, then *Liberation* may be a game that interests you – it follows a similar formula, only with a team of four droids. There's lots of dialogue, a fairly simple interface, and certainly quite a lot of fighting – one moment you're telling someone to frag off, and the next someone's grabbed you for some full metal fisticuffs. Great for fans of the genre.



» PREY: AN ALIEN ENCOUNTER

■ DEVELOPER: **KIRKMORENO**
■ YEAR: **1994**

■ Fancy a weird FMV game? Sci-fi-type games was one of the few things that the CD32 did quite well, and *Prey* stands out as a strange and unheralded effort… it's not necessarily a good game, but plenty of effort went into the plot, and there's lots of maze-based fun and a bit of joystick waggling when you're fighting. The weird cutscenes certainly make it worthwhile.



Beatmania Controller fact

■ Many of the Japanese Beatmania releases were 'Append Discs' – special expansions which required a 'Key Disc' to function. If you're going to start importing *Beatmania*, make sure you know which releases work as standalone games!



ESSENTIAL GAME Beatmania

While the controller is considered an example of localisation gone wrong, the European version of *Beatmania* retains the excellent gameplay of the arcade game while including the key features a music game requires for mainstream success. Chief amongst these is a carefully-chosen tracklist including hits such as Moloko's *Sing It Back* and *Jacques Your Body* by Les Rhythmes Digitales. There's also some classic Konami remixes in there, including *Salamander* and the *Metal Gear Solid* theme.



Beatmania Controller

» PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION **» RELEASED:** 2000 **» COST:** £39.99 (LAUNCH, WITH BEATMANIA), £15+ (TODAY)

While Konami wasn't necessarily the company that introduced most players to rhythm action games, it has arguably been the most influential company in the development of the genre. Starting with *Beatmania* in 1997, the company racked up a succession of arcade hits in the late Nineties including *Dance Dance Revolution*, *Pop'n Music*, *Guitar Freaks* and *Drummania*. Emboldened by its success in the coin-op market, Konami decided to bring music games home to PlayStation owners, with *Beatmania* once again leading the charge.

The only problem was that *Beatmania* cabinets used a bespoke control panel with five buttons and a turntable for each player – something that couldn't easily be replicated on a PlayStation pad. As a result, the company manufactured its own officially-licensed *Beatmania* controllers and ASCII provided a cheaper alternative. However, when the time came to bring the game to Europe, Konami bundled it with a new version of the controller featuring a raised turntable and the five main buttons arranged in piano-style fashion. Fans weren't impressed with the new design, and it's widely regarded as a poor decision today. Konami had far greater success in bringing its arcade music games home with *Dancing Stage Euromix*, and quietly abandoned *Beatmania* in Europe. *



Street Fighter had its mechanics, Mortal Kombat had its gore. Yet both were missing one key ingredient: Clay. Mitch Wallace chats with those responsible for bringing the enchantment of stop-motion to the 16-bit consoles

If you've watched any film or television show over the past few decades, there's a chance you've experienced the brilliant work of Ken Pontac and David Ichioka. Good friends since the first grade and, according to Ken, "the kids who drew in school", the two got their break working on *Gumby Adventures* back in 1987 and went on to cocreate the ABC stop-motion extravaganza *Bump In The Night*. They've also contributed to countless other projects throughout the years, with David recently donning a producer credit for *The Boxtrolls* movie and Ken writing DC's new *Wacky Raceland* comics. But early on in their careers, the creative duo decided to jump into the videogame arena with its production company, Danger Productions. The resulting insanity was a fighter unlike any seen – or moulded – before.

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** INTERPLAY
- » **DEVELOPER:** VISUAL CONCEPTS/DANGER PRODUCTIONS
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PLATFORM:** SNES, MEGA DRIVE
- » **GENRE:** FIGHTING



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

FLOIGAN BROS. EPISODE 1 [PICTURED]
SYSTEM: DREAMCAST
YEAR: 2001

ONE
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1997

HARLEY'S HUMONGOUS ADVENTURE
SYSTEM: SNES
YEAR: 1993

ClayFighter's story begins with a genetic precursor of sorts, a unique platformer that utilised similar digitised assets and would, as it so happens, set the stage for innovations to come.

"We initially got involved with Visual Concepts through a couple friends of ours on a game called Harley's Humongous Adventures," Ken recalls. "The big concept of that game was that we were going to do the animated assets as photo grabs of clay puppets, which were then going to be turned into sprites and sequenced. Most of them kind of look like shit because they were so low-res, but the bosses were big enough that you could start to really see some of the modelling and shading. That got the guys at Visual Concepts pretty interested in the possibilities, because nothing looked like that back then."

The potential for something bigger and better couldn't be ignored, so in the interest of creative conquest, a few preliminary steps were taken. "We ran tests on some bigger puppets, just to show how things would look," says Ken. "[Visual Concepts] said 'Yeah, this is great'. *Street Fighter* was becoming pretty popular back then, so they said 'Let's do a fighting game with clay characters,' and we said, 'That sounds like fun!'"

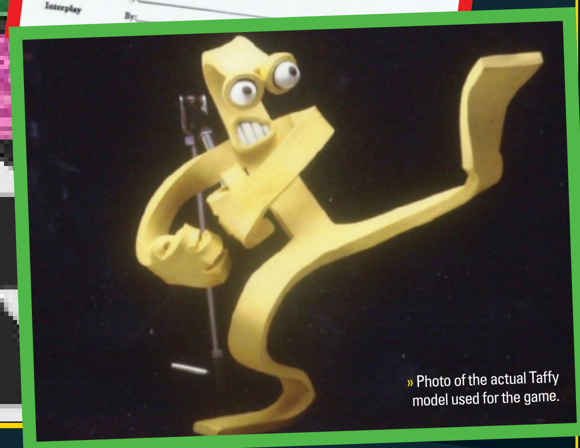
Interplay would eventually sign on as publisher, and with that, the wacky brawler was underway. But unlike traditional stop-motion animation, everything in *ClayFighter* would have to be meticulously planned out, every movement painstakingly measured and decided on before the first block of clay could even be carved.

"The first thing we did was draw all the characters





» Bad Mr. Frosty concept art.



» Photo of the actual Taffy model used for the game.

and moves on animation paper and use those as the bible on how we were going to animate everything," David says. "All the testing for all the animations was all done in 2D before we ever touched 3D."

And when it came to character ideas, the sky was most definitely the limit. Ken and David sat together in a room and spitballed, throwing around funny ideas and riffing on various concepts that, through ongoing revisions, gradually evolved. The ultimate goal? Create memorable fighters with matching move sets that would sell players on the game's humour and charm.

"We would do a design or two and send them over to Interplay," Ken says, recalling the approval process. "They would either say, 'No, we don't like idea at all, just kill it,' or 'Yeah, that would be cool, but we're not crazy about that design, so can you make some changes?'"

Barring some minor revisions from the publisher, Danger Productions enjoyed mostly free reign in regard to character direction. There were, however, some design notes taken from Capcom's colossal arcade smash, which the team was able to play early on a Super Famicom cartridge.

"We played a lot of *Street Fighter II*," Ken admits, "and we noticed that Dhalsim had some transformative moves, and some of the fighters could do some things that were beyond their primary physicality. And we thought, 'Well, this is clay, so it's got to be metamorphic. What kind of characters do that kind of stuff?'"

Out of those pitch sessions sprang eight inane fighters: A Viking, a bodybuilder, an Elvis impersonator, an amorphous blob, a psycho circus clown, a man made of taffy, an evil snowman and a pumpkin-headed ghost. Not the typical cast of combatants by any stretch of the imagination, especially when compared to peer offerings of the time. These were battling oddities with loads of personality, strange figments seemingly ripped from a funhouse fever dream. Now that they were designed and approved, they could be unleashed into the real world. And so the sculpting began.

"The Blob was easily the most work intensive, because every bit of every transformation had to be sculpted," Ken says. And with David's following explanation, it's easy to understand why: "With the Blob, it wasn't frame-by-frame animation, where we would change something each frame," he elaborates. "We would have to build a bunch of those blobs, hundreds, and we'd replace them, one after another. For every frame of animation, we built a blob."

Other fighters were less strenuous to compose. These included the likes of the frigid Bad Mr. Frosty and the horrific clown Bonker, and also the wiry Taffy, who was made of an elastic clay. "Taffy was all normal, straight-ahead stop-motion," David

"First thing we did was draw all the characters and moves on animation paper" David Ichioka

» [SNES] Concept art for a pirate skeleton character that never made it into the final game.

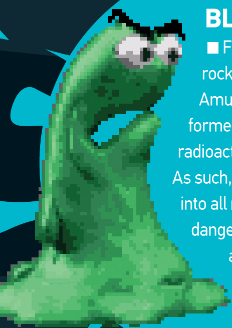




CLAYFIGHTER 101

■ Steeped in stop-motion animation and sporting an roster of digitised clay models, this goofy fighter takes place amongst the rubble of an abandoned amusement park/ circus following a radioactive meteor strike. Boasting casual, friendly mechanics and an entirely bloodless aesthetic, Visual Concepts' humorous and lighthearted brawler stands in stark contrast to the prototypical one-on-ones of the early Nineties.

MEET THE CAST



BLOB
■ Following the space rock disaster at Playland Amusement Park, Blob formed itself from the meteor's radioactive, claytastic byproduct. As such, it can frivolously morph into all manner of oppositional and dangerous shapes, including a shoe, a boxing glove, and even a deadly circular saw.



ICKYBOD CLAY
■ The circus' resident poltergeist and mischievous disembodied spirit, Ickybod Clay is an airborne haunt comprised of tattered sheets and one wicked jack-o'-lantern. He can tap into the ethereal plane to teleport, launch a shimmering Ecto Ball or even deliver a devastating Ecto Punch.



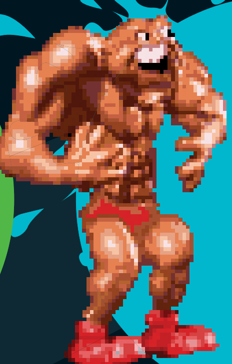
BLUE SUEDE GOO
■ Channeling the late King of Rock 'n' Roll in more ways than one, Blue Suede Goo has the moves and the outfit to put impersonators to shame. His Hair Blade is a force to be reckoned with, but its his dangerous Humming Attack that really leaves his opponent shaken up.



HELGA
■ An intimidating fighter from the far north, Helga is championed by her Viking people and has been endowed with powers from Thor and Odin. She can spin through the air via her Viking Ram or career toward opponents with the aptly-named Valkyrie's Ride. She loves clay salad sandwiches.



BONKER
■ The only ClayFighter to have worked at the circus prior to the meteor strike, Bonker has turned his old clown tricks into hilarious weapons of war. His rotten Flying Pie serves as a solid range attack, and the Cutting Cartwheel can really clear a fighting ring. Just watch out for his spraying lapel flower.



TINY
■ A weightlifting member of the WCWA (World Clay Wrestling Association) and self-proclaimed wimp-hater, Tiny isn't necessarily the sharpest tack in the box. He is, however, the most ripped of all the contestants, and can pummel his opponents with both his Sucker Punch and Flying Medicine Ball attacks.



BAD MR. FROSTY
■ Pay no mind to the classic Christmas tale, as this snowman has no intentions of ever melting. Bad Mr. Frosty shares his plans for everlasting winter with his adversaries by either launching a Frozen Fist or by rolling up and executing his Snow Ball attack.



TAFFY
■ Taffy began life as a piece of – what else, really – salt water taffy, so his distaste for dentistry is hardly surprising. Stretchy limbs give him an advantageous reach, while his insatiable taste for sweets and the accompanying sugar rush fuel his Taffy Tornado and Taffy Whack.



▶ says. "He had different lengths of arms and legs, and those would be replaced."

In general, build processes tended to differ from fighter to fighter. Ken illuminates one such method in regard to *ClayFighter*'s lumpy strongman. "Tiny was originally sculpted out of a hard material, Super Sculpey probably, then baked, put into a box and moulded," he says. "We had a silicone mold that we would pour molten clay into and pop out a Tiny."

Once the puppets were squared away, it was time to bring them into what would be their final destination: the digital space. And as David laments, it wasn't exactly easygoing. "I actually spent a lot of brain-destroying hours sitting at a table and writing programs in Arexx on the Amiga," he remembers. "All so I could operate this very early video-grabber and capture the puppets' images electronically. We also used that same technology to record the original pencil drawings, adding frames and subtracting frames to fine-tune the animation. Once we were positive we knew what the characters' positions would be for every frame, we then finally shot the digital images."

Ken also remembers some of the difficulty in transporting their clay creations from detailed works of physical art to rudimentary digital sprites that appeared on the 16-bit machines of the time. "What we kind of struggled with a lot of the time was to get the lighting and position of the puppet just right so you'd get the maximum amount of information for what was still a pretty miserly amount of pixels," he groans. "This was still not a particularly high-res medium. There was always some fairly extensive cleanup to do after the frames were grabbed and rendered down into whatever jumble of pixels they ended up being."



» [SNES] The stages in *ClayFighter* are just as colourful and varied as the characters.



» [SNES] Blob concept art.



Game designer Chris Tremmel was brought on some ways into the project to help with one of the last developmental stages: translating all the raw captured data into something playable via animation and move sequencing.

"I took a few thousand frames of characters and tweaked and tuned them to fit what the current design called for," he says. "We also took a lot of frames from various moves and created new moves from scratch. We couldn't reshoot stuff for obvious reasons, so because of having to photograph all of the stop-motion stuff up front, we ran into a lot of challenges when it came to implementing and tuning the gameplay."

Hurdles to overcome, yes, but not surprising for a team that was still relatively new to game development. They learned as they went and course-corrected when needed. "As the game evolved, the animations that we had previously shot called for a lot of adjustments in timing and frame count," Chris further explains. "This was no one's fault, honestly. We were all still learning how to make games!"

Everything obviously came together, as *ClayFighter* was unleashed onto the Super Nintendo in 1993. It got the cover treatment in several gaming publications and was generally received as an enjoyable fighting alternative, a family-friendly option for those who weren't keen on the genre's increasing fascination with graphic realism. But how did it compare to its most obvious fighting competition, *Street Fighter II*? "Both games have their strengths and weaknesses," David admits. "*ClayFighter* had the characters and it had the fun, and it wasn't just about fighting. Because we wanted humour and we wanted those characters, everything we did wasn't as perfectly tuned as a game like *Street Fighter II*.

> **"ClayFighter had the characters and it had the fun"**
> David Ichioka

That was an amazing accomplishment, especially back in those days. *Street Fighter II* was tight. I'd say we were not as tight, but we had a lot more personality."

In recent years, a reboot was in the works, but with Interplay putting the rights for *ClayFighter* up for sale, it's probably safe to say those plans have been scrapped. As such, the future of the series is anyone's guess, but as Ken testifies, its legacy lives on.

"I was at a convention a few years ago," he says, "and I was on a panel just talking about all the stuff I've done. I didn't even mention *ClayFighter*, but the moderator happened to announce that I worked on it. This woman in the audience in her early twenties, her face just lit up, and she said, 'Oh my god! I love that game! I used to play that with my dad! The look on her face and the joy in her voice made it all worthwhile."

Perhaps it's a testament to the wonder of stop-motion, or the magic of the 16-bit era. Or maybe it boils down to what happens when a talented group of people get together and create something special, something they care about. "Those are the moments you live for," Ken concludes. "The fact that people are still interested in something I did 24 years ago is just really nice." *

Special thanks to Ken Pontac, David Ichioka, Chris Tremmel and Josephine T. Huang.

JOSEPHINE T. HUANG INTERVIEW

We talk to the woman who sculpted the iconic ClayFighters



How did you come to be involved with *ClayFighter*?

I had been interning on *The Nightmare Before Christmas* in San Francisco and I was also going to art college. They were trying to hire me on *Nightmare*, but they couldn't because I was a student. From there I got recommended to Ken and Dave.

What was your role on the project?

My job was to sculpt all the characters and their in-betweens. So if a character was going from one flat shape to standing up tall and thin, then I would sculpt the flat piece and also everything in between as it animated into that tall shape. Most of them were already drawn, so I was sculpting clay based off of previously-designed drawings.

How long did it take to create each clay sculpture?

It depended on how much detail there was on each part and also on the density of the clay. Like with the Blob, I had to really knead the clay down, and it was ages before I could even get into sculpting him.

Did you have a favourite fighter?

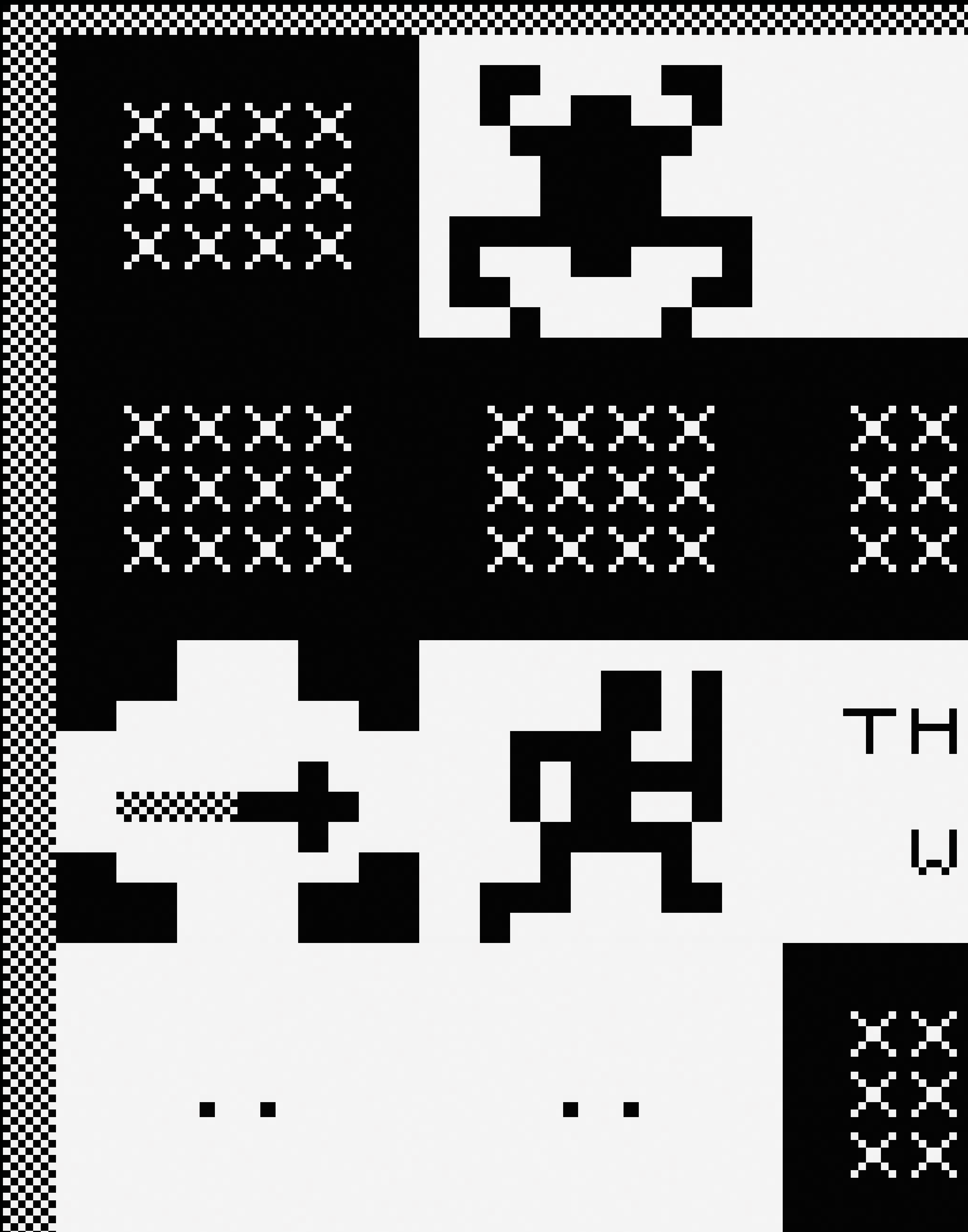
I really liked Helga, because she was female and quite funny-looking. And she had those pigtails!

Any funny stories from development?

I was pretty young at the time, 19 or 20, and I actually lived pretty close to the studio in a flat with roommates. The studio only had little toaster-style ovens, so we had to use the oven in my funky college apartment to bake clay. I remember carefully walking through the Mission District with trays of these little sculpted pieces of clay covered with foil. Then I was basically hanging out in my funky house with Ken, waiting for these weird clay monster pieces to bake in my oven!



» [SNES] Josephine working on various forms of the Blob.


TH
W

Mazogs

THIS GEM BY DON PRIESTLEY IS A-MAZE-ING

» RETROREVIVAL



» **ZX81** » **DON PRIESTLEY** » **1982**

I've always been a huge fan of Don Priestley's games and it's always pained me that I've been unable to secure an interview with **Retro Gamer** like I did when I was the Retro Editor at *games™*.

Don was a relative latecomer to coding, learning to code when he and his son enrolled in a Pascal course at night school. Don, who was a teacher at the time, continued to code long after his son dropped the course, and he went on to purchase a ZX81, where he really flexed his coding muscles.

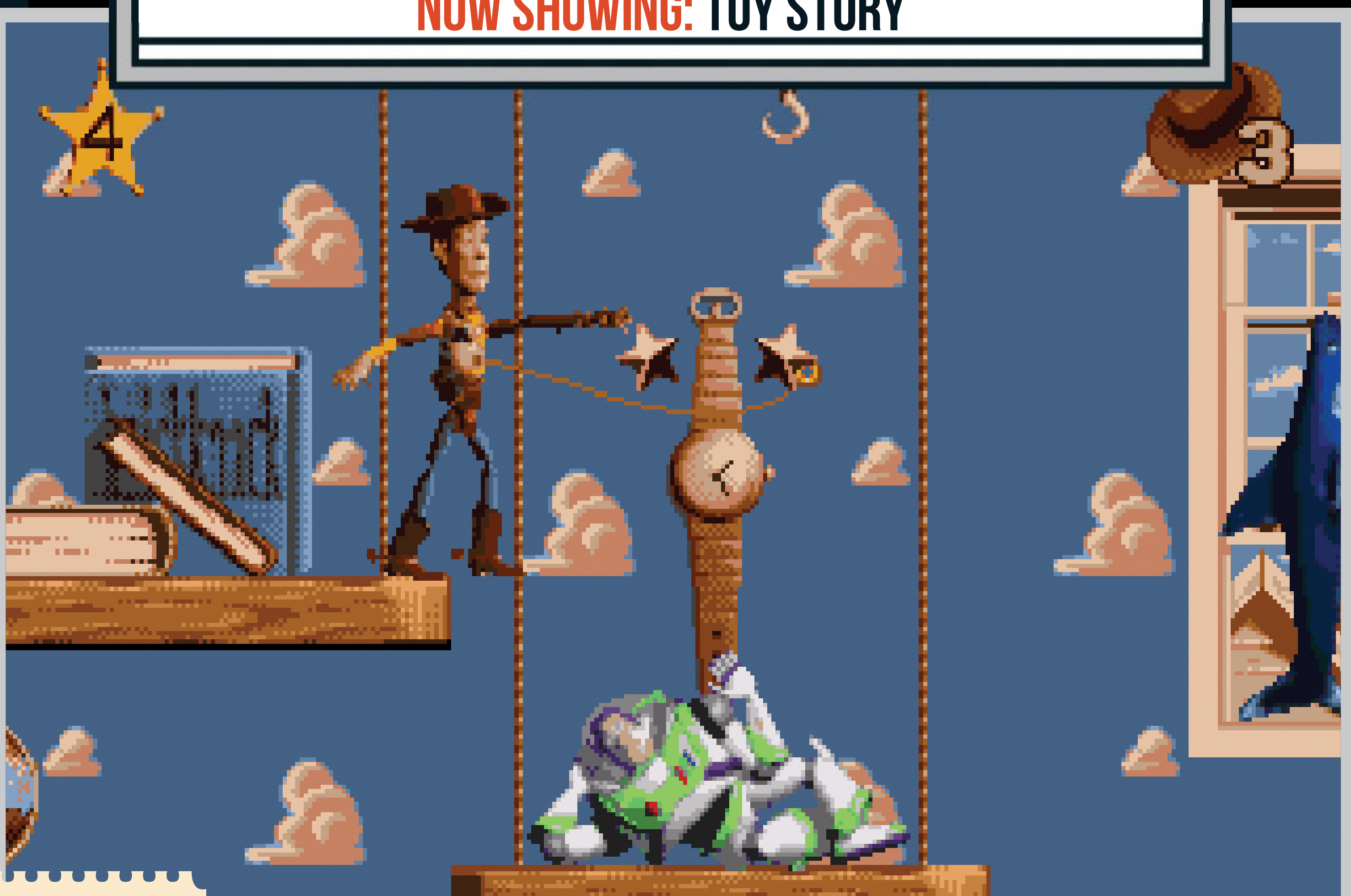
Even today, *Mazogs* looks impressive. Yes it looks incredibly basic at a casual glance, but that quick glance soon turns to amazement once you realise you're not actually look at sprites but simple ASCII characters. Like Malcolm Evans (another elder gentleman from the predominantly young Eighties coding scene), Don was able to make you forget that you were staring at a bunch of ASCII characters and instead convince you that you were taking part in a deadly quest where danger and excitement lurked around every corner.

Mazogs gave you a set number of moves to navigate a gigantic maze and retrieve the treasure buried within it. The treasure was placed a set number of moves away, and referring to your map cost you a further ten moves. Enemies would lay in wait in the dank tunnels and couldn't be passed unless you picked up one of the many swords that were lying around. You could also retrieve clues to the treasure's location, which would stay in place for a certain amount of time, which made your quest that little bit easier. Don's excellent game even gave you a variety of different quests to attempt, with the most difficult dungeon featuring roaming monsters that would patrol the corridors making your quest that little more treacherous. A technically-accomplished masterpiece that still holds up brilliantly today.



LICENCE TO THRILL

NOW SHOWING: TOY STORY



FILM

- » **YEAR:** 1995
- » **STUDIO:** Pixar Animation Studios
- » **DIRECTOR:** John Lasseter
- » **STARRING:** Tom Hanks, Tim Allen, Don Rickles, Jim Varney, Wallace Shawn, John Ratzenberger, Annie Potts
- » **BUDGET:** $30,000,000
- » **BOX OFFICE:** $373,600,000

GAME

- » **YEAR:** 1995
- » **PUBLISHER:** Disney Interactive Studios, Sega, Black Pearl Software
- » **DEVELOPER:** Traveller's Tales, Tiertex Design Studios

Released in the twilight years of the SNES and Mega Drive, Toy Story passed many gamers by. Darran Jones argues why it's the perfect companion to Pixar's stellar movie

When *Toy Story* arrived in 1995 it ushered in a new way of experiencing movies. While more and more traditionally-animated films were dabbling with computer technology in order to create key moments in their movies – *Beauty And The Beast* and *The Lion King* being two notable Disney examples – *Toy Story* was the first feature-length, computer-animated movie ever released in cinemas, and the first to come from Pixar itself.



» [Mega Drive] *Toy Story*'s presentation is faultless. An Etch A Sketch is used to fill in the narrative gaps.

Helmed by John Lasseter, now the chief creative officer at Pixar, DisneyToon Studios and Walt Disney Animation Studios, *Toy Story* is essentially a buddy movie, a tale that's been told in Hollywood many, many times before. Tom Hanks played Sheriff Woody, the leader of a group of toys owned by Andy; he also happened to be Andy's favourite playmate. The arrival of Buzz Lightyear, a cool new space astronaut, voiced by Tim Allen, immediately created friction in the group, with both Andy and the toys impressed by Buzz's newfangled features. Buzz is deluded, however, initially believing himself to be an actual Space Ranger, much to the frustration of Woody. His faith is finally tested after he watches an advert featuring other Buzz Lightyears and realises that he's just a toy after all, leaving Woody to rescue the despondent Buzz so he can earn back the favour of his friends. After an intense rivalry, Buzz and Woody eventually team up when the pair are captured by Andy's psychotic neighbour, Sid, and Buzz realises the importance of being there for Andy.

Toy Story's gestation wasn't easy, and the script went through many changes, featuring a large number of scriptwriters, including Alec Sokolow,



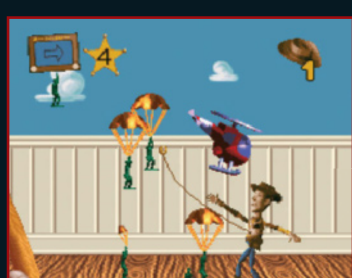
> **"Listen, Lightsnack. You stay away from Andy. He's mine, and no one is taking him away from me"**
> Woody



» [Mega Drive] Its visuals were impressive for the time. Few Mega Drive owners would have thought this was possible back in 1988.

Joel Cohen and Joss Whedon. The two main characters were originally Tinny, the one-man band, who featured in Pixar's first animated short, *Tin Toy*, and a ventriloquist's dummy, with Woody planned as the main villain. There were also difficulties between Pixar (which was still owned by Steve Jobs at the time) and Disney, which also added issues. Disney's Jeffrey Katzenberg wanted proprietary rights to the technology Pixar used for its 3D animation, while Steve Jobs wanted Pixar to have joint ownership of the film and its characters, as well as control over video and sequel rights. Neither got their wish, however. A deal was eventually reached, which placated both parties, but *Toy Story*'s problems were far from over and the production was shut down following a disastrous early showing to Jeffrey Katzenberg and other Disney executives in November 1993. John Lasseter asked for, and received, two weeks to rework the script. During the shutdown, Steve Jobs kept Pixar afloat with his own personal funding, leaving Lasseter and his team to focus on rewriting the script. Disney eventually approved of the changes and *Toy Story* was back in production by February 1994, with the cast returning the following month to record their new lines. Despite a difficult development, the film proved to be a massive success for all involved and went on to become the highest grossing film of the year, beating *Die Hard With A Vengeance*, *Apollo 13* (also starring Tom Hanks) and the highly anticipated return of James Bond in *GoldenEye*.

Despite the difficulties in reaching the screen, Disney Interactive had no problems finding developers to work on the videogame adaptations, eventually handing the Mega Drive, SNES and PC versions to Traveller's Tales, while Tiertex Design Studios concentrated on the Game Boy adaptation. Traveller's Tales was already on Disney's radar thanks to its fun platformer *Mickey Mania*, which had received great acclaim in 1994 ▶



» [SNES] The first level has you freeing a bunch of toy soldiers and leading them to safety.

MOVIE-TO-GAME COMPARISON

How scenes from the silver screen shaped up next to the various home console versions



"FALLING WITH STYLE"

Desperate to get back to Andy, Buzz and Woody fire themselves into the sky via a rocket and then use Buzz's wings to glide into Andy's mum's car. It's replicated perfectly on the home versions, although there are far more vehicles and hazards for the two friends to avoid on the way.



"THE CLAW!"

When Sid spots Buzz in a claw machine, he eagerly captures the space ranger, netting Woody in the process, who was desperately trying to save him. The game version spices things up a bit, by having Woody throwing aliens up in the air in an attempt to distract Sid from claiming his prize.



PIZZA PLANET PURSUIT

When Buzz and Woody find themselves stranded at Pizza Planet, they hide inside discarded food and drink cartons in an attempt to find Andy. This is replicated brilliantly in the game, with some impressive graphics to boot, as gigantic pairs of legs move by our two heroes.



WOODY TURNS EVIL

Jealous of the attention that Buzz is receiving from Andy and the rest of the toys, Woody uses R.C. against his will to knock Buzz outside of the house. The game version makes more of a meal of it, turning it into a top-down driving game where you must shunt Buzz along to the goal.



CREATING TOY STORY

Jon Burton revisits the classic platformer

How did you become involved with *Toy Story*?
We had great success with our Disney game *Mickey Mania*, and so our producer from Disney (Craig Allen) approached us about making a game of an experimental computer animated movie that Disney were making. I don't think Disney had total faith in the film otherwise we probably wouldn't have been offered it as Disney were working bigger studios and publishers at the time, and we were given seven months to make the game. Disney management thought we could never complete it in that time, but Craig backed us up and put his job on the line that we would hit the date. We got the game complete and out to market in time with the film. As far as I know that was the first time ever that a game was launched at the same time as the movie. The trend used to be that if a movie was successful then a game would be made. After we sold nearly 3 million copies the trend changed!

Did you receive support from Disney?
Craig, our Disney producer, was great. He did anything he could to get us reference and animation sequences to view from the movie. I had a great meeting with John Lasseter where he stayed late to discuss the 3D sections of the game. And we had to teach Pixar about 'run cycles' as they ended up doing all the animation for Woody for the game. We had to create a set of our own animations for him just in case they couldn't deliver, but at the last minute they did, so all of Woody's animations in the game are by Pixar.

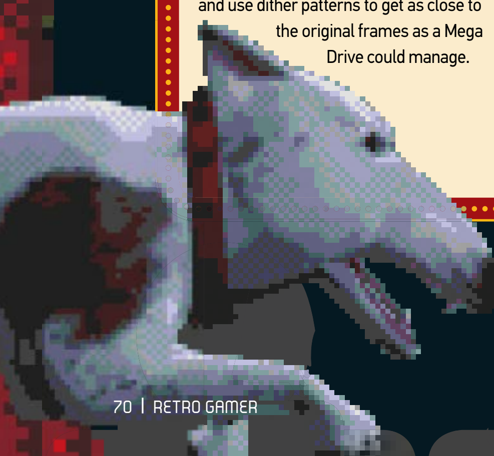
How did you create the Mega Drive's prerendered visuals?
We created all our models for each character and animated and rendered them all on Silicon Graphics machines. Then each frame was processed on in-house software to reduce the colours and use dither patterns to get as close to the original frames as a Mega Drive could manage.

***Toy Story* is visually amazing, what difficulties did you face making it?**
Getting the 3D *Doom*-style sections to work was hard. There were so many restrictions to the Mega Drive even attempting such a thing, so I found that pretty hard to code! Also, getting the 3D effects like the sides of bookcases moving correctly and so on was very labour-intensive, as each section needed its own map of unique blocks and animation frames laying out.

***Toy Story* has some brutal difficulty spikes. Did Disney intentionally ask for these, like it did with the second level of *The Lion King*?**
No, that was my fault! The problem with making games is you get very good at them while you're testing them. And then you find it too easy so you make it harder, and so on. I had tales from Disney about children in tears at the fifth level, for instance! I learnt a lesson about difficulty curves from *Toy Story*!

Where did the idea for the different minigames originate?
I had mocked up a test of the 3D *Doom* code (complete with Mickey holding a Gatling Gun) just for fun, so I thought using the code in the game made sense. A variation of that code was used for the driving sections. I always wanted to have as much variety and innovation in a game as possible, so I wasn't afraid of designing a game with plenty of different viewpoints, but I started regretting it when I was trying to finish them all in time for the film's release!

What was the trickiest thing to get right from a gameplay point of view?
Woody isn't the most aggressive character in the world, and we couldn't give him a gun, for obvious reasons, so a lot of time and experimentation had to go into what would his attacks be and how would that be fun, especially as we couldn't have him killing anyone like Mr. Potato Head. I came up with the idea that he could use his pull-string as a lasso and tie-up enemies, and that they would break free a short time later. It was an interesting mechanic that led to nice timing puzzles.





▶ due to its excellent visuals, which depicted Mickey adventuring through his greatest cartoons, including his black-and-white debut, *Steamboat Willy*. Traveller's Tales knew how technically impressive Pixar's new film was going to be, and did everything it could to ensure its own game was of a similar standard. 1994 also saw Rare unleash the astonishing *Donkey Kong Country*, which married rock-solid platforming –based gameplay to incredible prerendered 3D graphics. The end result was that Rare's game looked insanely good, and it gave the game a wonderful cartoon-like feel. The technical prowess wasn't lost on Jon Burton and his small team at Traveller's Tales, and they soon adopted a similar style for their game.

Toy Story was released extremely late in the Mega Drive's life, hitting the U.S. in December 1995 and then reaching Japan and Europe in April 1996. Nearly 200 games were released on Sega's console in 1994, but that number dropped by over half for 1995 and half again for 1996. A similar situation was happening on the SNES, where support was also dwindling. Many gamers had been lured in by the 32-bit power of the PlayStation and Saturn, which had both begun to establish themselves around the world. Both consoles were still young, though, and *Toy Story*'s younger audience wouldn't have been a good fit due to the expense of the consoles, which probably explains why neither console received a port of the game.



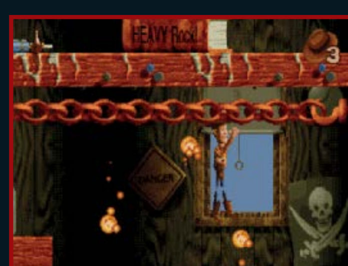
» [Mega Drive] This stage is excellent, with Woody dashing around the 3D maze in search of aliens to rescue.

> "You are a sad, strange little man"
> Buzz Lightyear

Those early 32-bit adopters missed out though, particularly on the Mega Drive, as it was a great example of a game that benefitted from being released late in a console's life cycle. While the prerendered visuals do still hold up today, it's the wonderful animation that really catches your eye. Whether he's trying to temporary snare a nearby toy, or is frantically running around after being set on fire, Woody's animation is always expressive and fun to witness. At the time he felt like a living breathing thing, and it's testament to the small team at Traveller's Tales that they were able to create such a technically accomplished game.

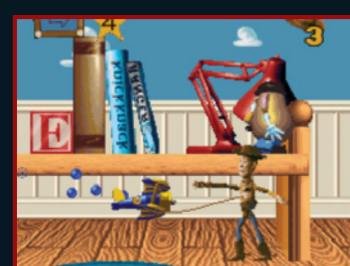
Equally commendable is the sheer amount of variety that was crammed into *Toy Story*. While it's a platformer

NOTABLE VERSIONS



MEGA DRIVE

■ For us, this is the definitive version of *Toy Story*. It takes a minor hit in the aesthetics department, especially up against the SNES version, but the prerendered sprites still manage to look superb on Sega's console. It features all the cutscenes from the film, additional digitised speech, which is missing from the SNES version, as well as all 17 levels.



SNES

■ Gameplay-wise the SNES version of *Toy Story* is largely comparable to its Mega Drive counterpart, but it feels a little more sluggish and clunky to play. It doesn't include the entertaining 'Day-Toy-Na' stage found in the Sega version, but looks far nicer. The audio is better, too, although it does lose a few lines of speech and has far fewer scenes from the movie.



» Traveller's Tales' access enabled the developer to get surprisingly close to the look and story of the film.



at heart, Traveller's Tales included all sorts of other game modes to ensure the action never became too boring. The unusual home settings really helped *Toy Story* stand apart from its platform peers, and in the first few stages alone you're running across the tops of cupboards, bouncing on abandoned balls and sneaking through a crowded arcade by hiding in discarded food cartons. Revisiting it today, the platforming isn't as tight as we'd like (although it feels noticeably better on the Mega Drive) and the difficulty is far too high in places, but it constantly engages with its themed-based missions, ensuring you're never simply running from point A to B. The first stage, for example, has you leading toy soldiers to safety, while the second requires you to place a number of Woody's friends into Andy's toy box within a set time limit.

Toy Story is full of variety and that becomes more apparent the deeper you delve into the game. Two levels are top-down and have you controlling R.C. , collecting batteries so your juice doesn't run out, while another, also featuring R.C., takes the form of an *OutRun*-styled racer, with Woody and R.C. racing to reach the car of Andy's mum. Two stages see you trying to outrace enemies, including Sid's vicious dog whilst riding either Rex or Roller Bob, but are let down by huge difficulty spikes, with the game throwing numerous enemies at you which are very difficult to dodge. By far the best stage is a frantic race in pseudo-3D around the insides of a claw machine, think *Doom* but with no guns and plenty of three-eyed aliens. Interestingly, the SNES version is far weaker than the Mega Drive version, taking place in a smaller area and running nowhere near as smoothly, while the PC lacks the stage entirely.

Toy Story remains a great example of a developer having strong access to a film to ensure it's as accurate as possible (the giant Buzz stage was actually a deleted scene) whilst utilising the strengths of a console to breaking point. It's a little rough around the edges when you return to it today, and the Mega Drive outing is arguably the best offering, but all versions are worth experiencing, if only to see how the aging systems were taken to infinity and beyond. *



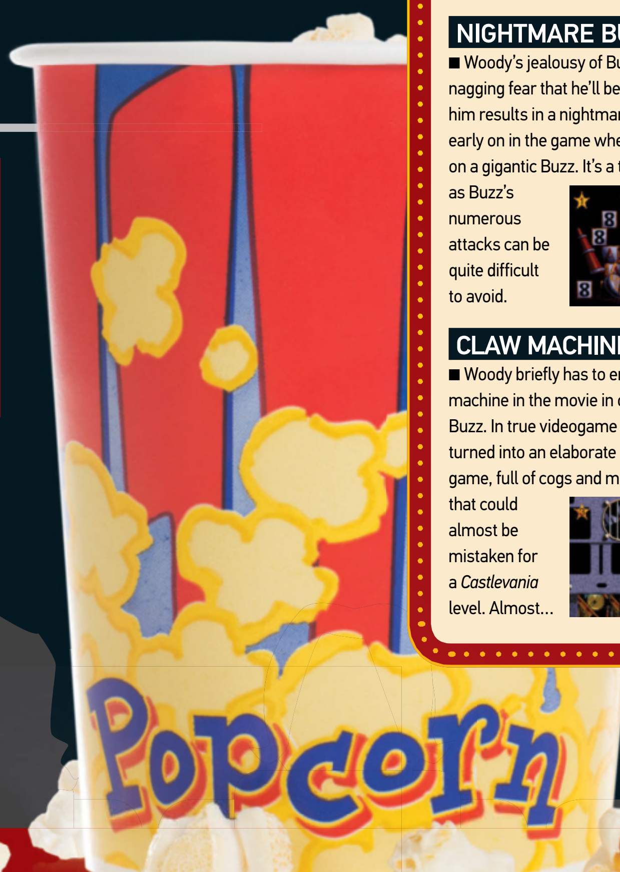
PC

■ The PC version is somewhere between the Mega Drive and SNES offerings. While it features the 'Day-Toy-Na' stage, it ironically drops the excellent *Doom*-inspired 'Really Inside The Claw Machine' level. It's aesthetically on par with the SNES outing, but it also contains all of the cutscenes and digitised speech that featured in the Mega Drive game.



GAME BOY

■ Yes, it's heavily compromised against its 16-bit peers, but we're still impressed with the Game Boy game and find it rather charming. It drops all the non-platform sections, meaning there are only ten stages in all, and none of the film's cutscenes have been included, but it controls well enough and looks rather decent, too. A surprisingly strong effort.



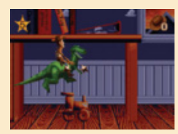


ARTISTIC LICENCE

These weren't in the film…

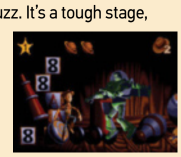
RIDE 'EM COWBOY

■ Remember that awesome scene in *Toy Story* where Woody jumps on the back of Rex and rides him around Andy's bedroom? Nope, we don't remember it either, but it crops up in the game, and it's one of the most difficult sections, too. In fact, we're getting angry just thinking about it. Grr.



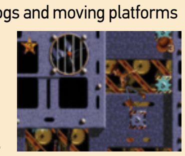
NIGHTMARE BUZZ

■ Woody's jealousy of Buzz and the nagging fear that he'll be replaced by him results in a nightmare sequence early on in the game where he must take on a gigantic Buzz. It's a tough stage, as Buzz's numerous attacks can be quite difficult to avoid.



CLAW MACHINE TERROR

■ Woody briefly has to enter a claw machine in the movie in order to save Buzz. In true videogame fashion it is turned into an elaborate level for the game, full of cogs and moving platforms that could almost be mistaken for a *Castlevania* level. Almost…



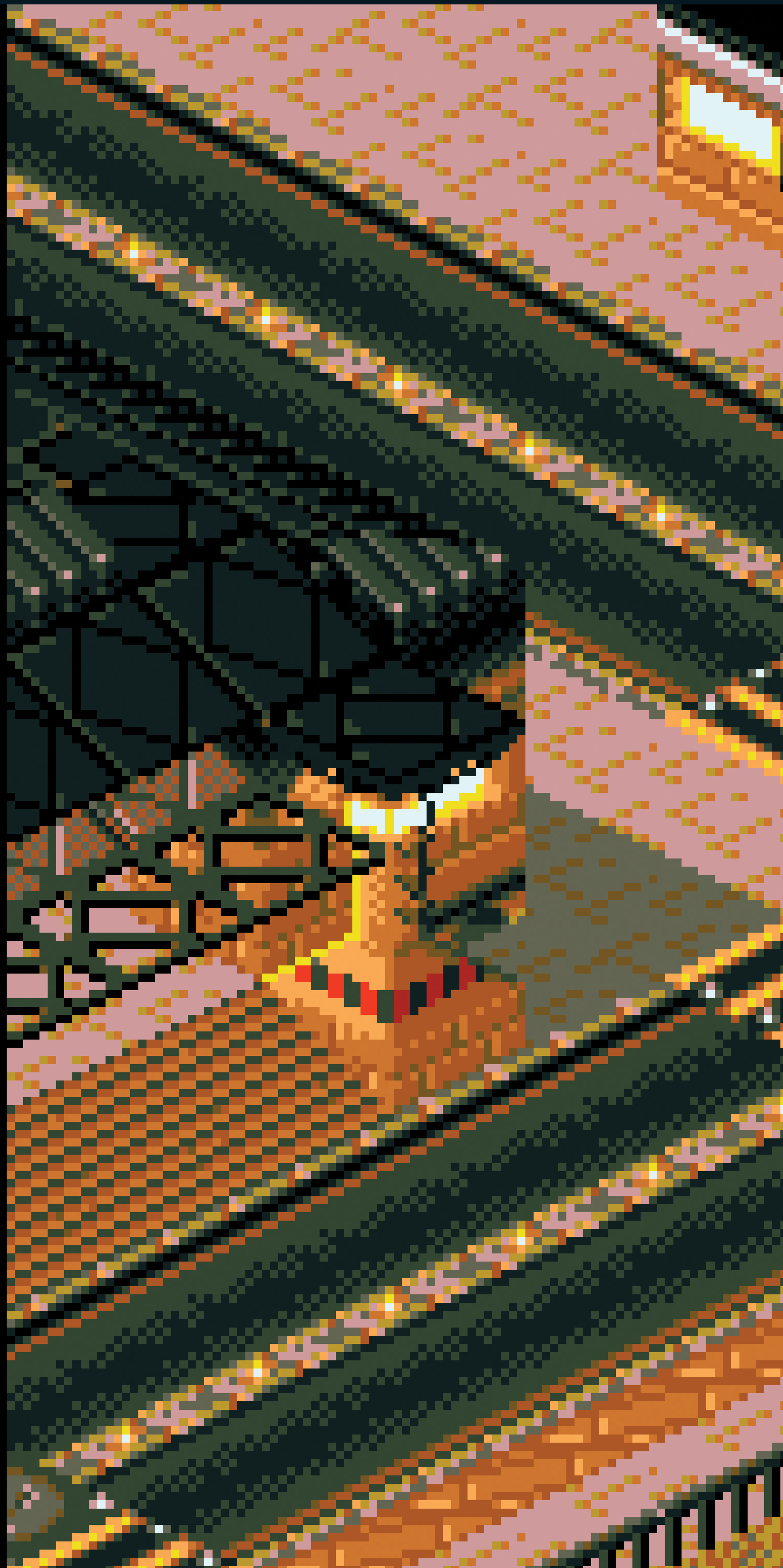
CLASSIC MOMENTS

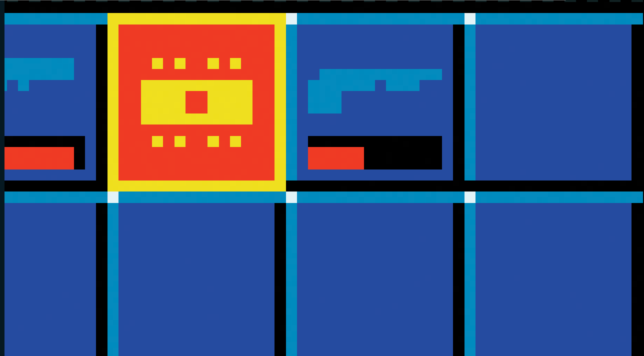
Syndicate

» **PLATFORM:** AMIGA » **DEVELOPER:** BULLFROG PRODUCTIONS
» **RELEASED:** 1993

In other strategy games, you amass troops simply by producing them from a menu. *Syndicate* doesn't offer anything quite so boring – to get your footsoldiers, you need to be a little more active in your recruitment. By which we mean, you're going to have to walk around brainwashing civilians with the brilliantly-named Persuadertron. With this little device, no matter where you are you can quickly amass a sizeable fighting force, which will follow you through the streets obediently.

Of course, not everyone is so easily persuaded. The average civilian will tag along with you without much in the way of resistance, but if you want to get the likes of police officers you're going to have to have a sizeable following already. But get them you will, and eventually you'll be leading what looks like the world's most sinister conga line through the streets – often en route to the location of an influential scientist or police chief, who will quickly learn just how persuasive you can really be… *





BIO

Syndicate provides a chilling and eerily plausible vision of the future, in which multinational corporations have grown to the point that they have supplanted national governments as the source of authority in the world. Of course, none of those corporations are too happy about the existence of other such entities, which is where you come in, along with your squad. In a series of real-time tactical missions, you'll achieve supremacy and unlimited profit potential for your own corporation. The game was a financial and critical success, so *Syndicate Wars* followed in 1996. *Syndicate*, a first-person shooter reboot, arrived in 2012.



MORE CLASSIC SYNDICATE MOMENTS

The First Hit Is Free



If you have any moral objections to the acts you perform in videogames, it's probably best not to attempt *Syndicate*, as it's a game which requires no small degree of ruthlessness. As soon as you get to grips with the game's control scheme, you'll have committed your first murder – assassination is the fate of those who oppose your company.

Horribly Wrong



Occasionally an audacious plan goes awry. You can't really help that, it's the nature of the game. What you can help is the gleeful little cackle you emit the first time you see your team emerge running and screaming from a recently-exploded vehicle. At the very least, it does offset the sting of having to make yet another trip to the cryo chamber…

Dangerous depths



Sometimes, you're just fighting police when things get out of hand, or an encounter with enemy agents escalates quickly. At other times, you'll simply go our of your way to cause as much carnage as possible with tooled-up agents. Either way, you win – and the reward for your indiscriminate use of firearms is a screen strewn with fresh corpses.

World Domination



From humble beginnings in Western Europe to eventual world conquest, it's a great feeling to see your colours slowly taking over the map as you establish a new corporate empire. As great as the main gameplay is, returning to the world map is a wonderful reminder of what you're working towards – and how close you are to achieving it.

Retro Gamer Readers' Choice



TOP 25 GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

It might not have had the longest lifespan, but Nintendo's handheld had more than its fair share of incredible games. Readers voted for over 150 different games, but only 25 can be considered truly elite – Nick Thorpe starts the countdown…

25 Gunstar Future Heroes

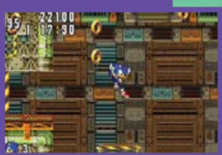
■ DEVELOPER: Treasure/Hitmaker
■ GENRE: Run-and-gun ■ YEAR: 2005



It feels more like a remake, but the return of *Gunstar Heroes* is packed with variety and some great throwback sections. Thanks to Treasure's programming, it's also one of the system's most impressive games.

24 Sonic Advance

■ DEVELOPER: Dimps
■ GENRE: Platformer ■ YEAR: 2001



It was almost heretical in 2001, but Nintendo's handheld proved to be a fine home for Sega's mascot. The first game in the *Advance* trilogy is the best of the bunch, sticking to what made the Mega Drive games great.

23 Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island

■ DEVELOPER: Nintendo
■ GENRE: Platformer ■ YEAR: 2002



The GBA was home to quite a few conversions of great SNES games, and *Yoshi's Island* is one of the very best. Very few compromises were made to bring the Super FX 2-powered original to the portable system.

22 F-Zero: Maximum Velocity

■ DEVELOPER: Nd Cube
■ GENRE: Racing ■ YEAR: 2001



Who needs full 3D when you can have the retro delight of Mode 7-style rotating race tracks? This sequel to the SNES classic delivers a brand-new set of vehicles and tracks, but keeps the classic fun.

21 Rhythm Tengoku

■ DEVELOPER: Nintendo SPD
■ GENRE: Rhythm action ■ YEAR: 2006



The very last first-party release for the GBA didn't make it out of Japan, but the thriving import market lapped up the addictive beat-based minigames. Sequels for the DS, Wii and 3DS followed.



6 REASONS TO REVISIT **KANTO**

20 Pokémon FireRed & LeafGreen

■ DEVELOPER: Game Freak
■ GENRE: RPG ■ YEAR: 2004

The original *Pokémon* games on the Game Boy were mind-blowingly successful games, but they weren't perfect. What's more, they weren't cross-compatible with the new Game Boy Advance games, so there was no way to get your precious Squirtle off that old cartridge. Fortunately, these remakes not only ensured that players could once again catch 'em all, they improved significantly on the originals with a wide range of new features.

Pokémon boast **all-new moves and abilities** introduced in the second and third-generation games, allowing for more complex battle strategies.

First-generation Pokémon all retain their later evolutionary lines, so you can pick up the likes of **Pichu, Magby, Crobat, Kingdra and Slowking.**

You can transfer Pokémon from *FireRed & LeafGreen* to the DS and 3DS games, allowing you to **preserve over a decade of progress.**

The monochrome and often ugly sprites of the original games have been replaced with far more appealing and on-model, **full-colour designs.**

You can now **breed your Pokémon**, providing the opportunity to pass down moves and stats in an attempt to get the best possible combination.

There's a much **more involved post-game** than in the originals – you can visit the Sevii Islands, catch legendary Pokémon and even fight the Elite Four again.

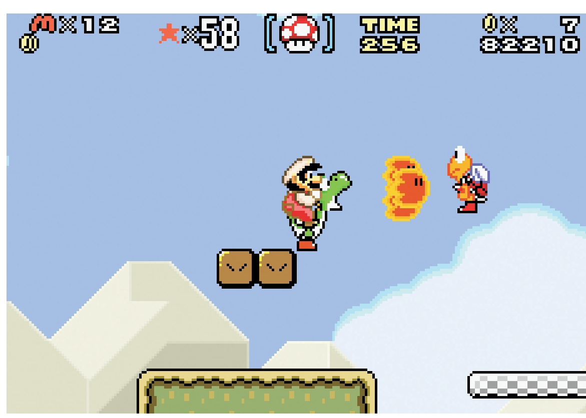
PERFECTION IN YOUR POCKET

19 Super Mario Advance 2: Super Mario World

■ DEVELOPER: Nintendo EAD
■ GENRE: Platformer ■ YEAR: 2001

When we asked our readers to name the very best games ever for issue 150 of **Retro Gamer**, *Super Mario World* was the one that topped the epic list due to its superlative level design, structure and sense of adventure. Since Nintendo saw fit to give it a portable outing on the Game Boy Advance, it stands to reason you'd be seeing it in this list too – it wasn't new, but it was a near-perfect game very closely replicated for handheld players.

Of course, there's a bit more to this release than being just a straight conversion of the SNES original. The colours have been lightened a bit to help owners of early Game Boy Advance models, there's a brand-new intro sequence, and there are now Dragon Coins in levels that didn't originally have them.



NEW TWISTS ON OLD WARES

18 Wario Ware Twisted

■ DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems
■ GENRE: Minigame collection ■ YEAR: 2004

■ ***Wario Ware Twisted*** **included both a gyro sensor and a rumble feature, allowing for motion-controlled games with a force-feedback feature.**

■ Unlike the first game, *Wario Ware Twisted* features games which require you to turn your system around – sometimes through a full-360 degrees.

■ **Despite the fact that the cartridge houses the gyro sensor, the game works identically on all compatible hardware (although we don't recommend using the Game Boy Player).**

■ *Wario Ware Twisted* wasn't released in Europe due to the presence of mercury within the gyro sensor – a banned substance in electronics within the European Union.



WAR NEVER CHANGES (MUCH)

17 Advance Wars 2



■ DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems
■ GENRE: Strategy ■ YEAR: 2003

The original *Advance Wars* was a stunningly good handheld strategy game, and the sequel didn't mess with a winning formula. A new campaign mode featured the Black Hole Army's bid for dominance over Macro Land, but few other substantial changes were made – here are the most notable ones…

■ Eight new commanding officers join the game – Hachi from Orange Star, Colin from Blue Moon, Yellow Comet's Sensei, Jess of Green Earth, plus Adder, Lash, Flak and Hawke from Black Hole.

■ As well as the original CO Powers, commanding officers in *Advance Wars 2* can charge up to a second level for Super CO Powers – enhanced versions of their usual characteristic abilities.



■ The brand-new Neotank unit gives a third level of armoured assault vehicle, proving stronger than both regular tanks and medium tanks. Of course, they're also more expensive.

■ Infantry units can now make use of one-shot missile silo emplacements, spreading damage across a wide area without having to get up close and personal with the enemy's forces.



SUPER RPG BROS.

16 Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga

■ DEVELOPER: AlphaDream ■ GENRE: RPG ■ YEAR: 2003

Having already had *Super Mario RPG* and *Paper Mario*, Nintendo's portly plumber wasn't satisfied with his level of role-playing stardom and roped his brother in for another new spin on the genre. Vibrant sprite work, genuinely amusing dialogue and simultaneous control of the brothers make this a treat.





RIGHTING THE WRONGS OF THE PAST

15 Final Fight One

■ DEVELOPER: Capcom ■ GENRE: Beat-'em-up ■ YEAR: 2001

In the late Eighties, you couldn't find a better arcade beat-'em-up than Capcom's *Final Fight*, so it's easy to understand why SNES owners would have been excited to get their hands on a conversion. Unfortunately for them, it wasn't all it could be – not only was it missing an entire level, one third of the protagonists, Guy, had done a runner and you couldn't even play a multiplayer game with the remaining characters Cody and Haggar. It wasn't a bad beat-'em-up, but it wasn't the experience that fans had hoped for.

Thankfully, Capcom was able to rectify all those mistakes on the GBA. The SNES visuals have been pulled across, but this time the game has the Industrial Area, you can play as all three characters, there are more enemies on screen and with a link cable you can even play co-op games. There are even some new additions for fans – each boss is now preceded by a dialogue scene, and the *Street Fighter Alpha 3* versions of Cody and Guy can be unlocked as alternate characters. It might just be the definitive version of the game.

RUMBLE WITH THE BOSSES

14 Drill Dozer

■ DEVELOPER: Game Freak ■ GENRE: Platformer ■ YEAR: 2005

There's more to Game Freak than *Pokémon*, although you wouldn't know it from the company's Noughties output – *Drill Dozer* is the only original IP the company developed during that entire decade. Luckily, it's an excellent platformer with a cool central mechanic. You take control of Jill, a member of the Red Dozers bandit gang and pilot of the powerful Drill Dozer. This vehicle can drill through walls, enemies, barriers and more, with more durable objects requiring you to shift to higher gears. The cartridge includes a built-in rumble feature, allowing you to really feel the carnage you're causing.





CROOG

This is your big bad guy, and in your early encounters he'll use this neat scorpion robot to attack you. You have to counter its drill with your own to damage it. After taking sufficient punishment, the boss will transform – and that's only the start of your troubles with Croog.



Haunted Statue

This malevolent masonry is possessed by an evil spirit, and is quite happy to splat you with its spiked mace! However, those spikes can retract if they make a big impact on the ground – when they do, you'll get an opportunity to drill into the mace and damage your enemy.



CARRIE

Carrie's a detective, and thus on the side of the forces of good. Of course, you're a bandit, so you're not exactly on the law-abiding side, which will bring you into conflict often. In this form, drill into the cable that connects the two halves of her police-bot to win.



Tank Dozer

Skullkers aren't particularly formidable enemies, so some of them will try to improve their odds by manning tanks. These are easy to take out – just drill into the front hole and accelerate to third gear. However, they have the ability to strike in tandem, so watch out…



13 Pokémon Ruby, Sapphire & Emerald

■ DEVELOPER: Game Freak
■ GENRE: RPG ■ YEAR: 2003



Unsurprisingly, the only brand-new *Pokémon* adventures for the Game Boy Advance were its bestselling games. Two-on-two battles were introduced for the first time, and 135 new creatures were available to catch – however, it was also the first set of games in the series in which you could no longer catch 'em all.

12 Castlevania

■ DEVELOPER: Konami Computer Entertainment Kobe
■ GENRE: Action-adventure ■ YEAR: 2001



It might not be Koji Igarashi's favourite *Castlevania*, but the first of the series' three Game Boy Advance versions is a hit with fans. Despite dark visuals unsuited for the original machine's non-lit screen, the game impressed with a structure that was reminiscent of the PlayStation classic *Symphony Of The Night*.

11 Final Fantasy Tactics Advance

■ DEVELOPER: Square Enix
■ GENRE: RPG ■ YEAR: 2003



This follow-up to the excellent PlayStation spin-off *Final Fantasy Tactics* is a masterful isometric strategy RPG, and since its plot is standalone you can jump right in. The most striking feature of this game is the Laws system, in which in-game judges forbid certain actions and reward others.



10 Golden Sun

■ DEVELOPER: Camelot Software Planning
■ GENRE: RPG ■ YEAR: 2001

There's no shortage of traditional Japanese RPGs on the Game Boy Advance, but this original effort even beats out beloved classics like *Final Fantasy VI* in your voting. The protagonist Isaac and his companions are out to stop alchemy from returning to the world of Weyard, in an attempt to prevent worldwide conflict. The most striking feature of the game is the ability to assign Djinn creatures to characters, altering their stats and classes as well as granting the ability to perform summon spells.



9 Fire Emblem

■ DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems
■ GENRE: Strategy ■ YEAR: 2003

After 13 years and six untranslated games, the *Fire Emblem* finally made its Western debut on the Game Boy Advance, and it was more than worth the wait. Excellent tactical battles and the ability to permanently lose your characters are the defining features of this game, which offers a substantial single-player campaign. Unfortunately for those of you that wish to pick up *Fire Emblem* now, scarcity has driven the second hand value far above its original retail price.

8 Astro Boy: Omega Factor

■ DEVELOPER: Treasure/Hitmaker
■ GENRE: Beat-'em-up ■ YEAR: 2003



Osamu Tezuka's famous creation gets an awesome beat-'em-up, courtesy of Sega's Hitmaker studio and technical wizards Treasure. What sets the *Omega Factor* apart from the rest is the non-linear structure that sees you jumping through time in an attempt to avert disaster, uncovering new and unseen parts of old levels in the process.

A NEW STYLE FOR ANCIENT EVIL



7 Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow

■ DEVELOPER: Konami ■ GENRE: Action-adventure ■ YEAR: 2003

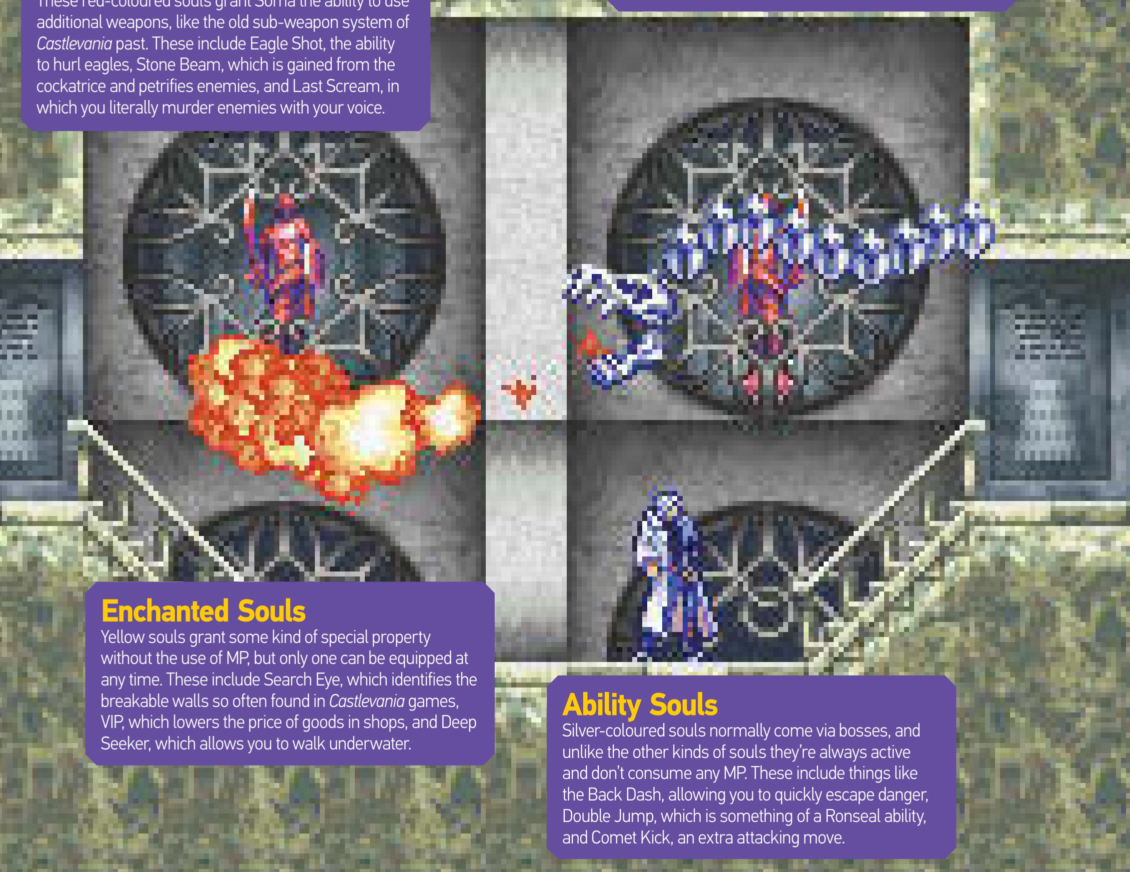
Castlevania is a series that takes place in the past. That's a fundamental truth of the franchise, and yet *Aria Of Sorrow* discards it with confidence to achieve a setting where Dracula has been revived in 2035. However, beyond the modern clothing of protagonist Soma Cruz, this is the kind of exploration-focused *Castlevania* that people have known and loved since Koji Igarashi's initial work on *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*. The big new feature here is the Tactical Soul system, which allows players to swap between abilities gained from defeating various enemies.





SWEET SOUL BROTHER

Learn how the Tactical Soul system works



Guardian Souls

These blue-coloured souls allow you to summon familiars and even transform into various nasty beasts. These souls include Devil Form, in which you become a devil and charge into enemies, Bat Form, which grants you the ability to fly about the castle, and Guardian Shadow Knight, which gives you an ally in battle.

Bullet Souls

These red-coloured souls grant Soma the ability to use additional weapons, like the old sub-weapon system of *Castlevania* past. These include Eagle Shot, the ability to hurl eagles, Stone Beam, which is gained from the cockatrice and petrifies enemies, and Last Scream, in which you literally murder enemies with your voice.

Enchanted Souls

Yellow souls grant some kind of special property without the use of MP, but only one can be equipped at any time. These include Search Eye, which identifies the breakable walls so often found in *Castlevania* games, VIP, which lowers the price of goods in shops, and Deep Seeker, which allows you to walk underwater.

Ability Souls

Silver-coloured souls normally come via bosses, and unlike the other kinds of souls they're always active and don't consume any MP. These include things like the Back Dash, allowing you to quickly escape danger, Double Jump, which is something of a Ronseal ability, and Comet Kick, an extra attacking move.



MICRO GAMES, MEGA FUN

6 Wario Ware Inc.: Minigame Mania

■ DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1 ■ GENRE: Minigame Collection ■ YEAR: 2003

Many of the best Game Boy Advance games are sequels and remakes, so a brand-new and innovative game is even more highly prized than usual – and *Wario Ware Inc.* is just such a game. The premise is simple: a rapid-fire procession of minigames, each with a singular goal and lasting no more than a few seconds at a time. The key to the game's appeal is variety – you never know what's coming next, and you'll be pushed hard as the speed increases and your reflexes struggle to keep up. Deservedly, this game was followed up by several sequels.

WARIO WAREHOUSE

A selection of the tiny games you'll take on in Wario Ware Inc.…



5 Metroid: Zero Mission

■ DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1
■ GENRE: Action-adventure ■ YEAR: 2004



When discussing how to follow up on *Metroid Fusion*, one of the developers suggested a conversion of *Super Metroid*, but Yoshio Sakamoto had other ideas. As a veteran of the series, Sakamoto decided to return to the roots of the series with a full remake of the original *Metroid*.

The presence of both *Metroid Fusion* and *Metroid: Zero Mission* on the GBA was beneficial. Both games offered different takes on the same template with *Zero Mission* favouring a more traditional *Metroid* experience.

HOW MINISH CAP ENHANCED ZELDA

4 The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap



■ DEVELOPER: Capcom ■ GENRE: Action-RPG ■ YEAR: 2004

■ Unlike the vast majority of *Zelda* games, this one wasn't developed by Nintendo – instead, it was outsourced to Capcom.

■ **Rather than manipulating time or the wind, Link is able to shrink in size in order to interact with the bug-sized Minish race.**

■ For the first time in a handheld *Zelda*, Link can learn new sword techniques as he progresses throughout the game.

■ **The brand-new Kinstones are pickups that, when fused, can yield rewards such as Rupees, sidequests and more.**

■ Many new gameplay elements have been added from the 3D games, including rolling when running and the icon-based HUD.

RETRO RACING **RIOT**

3 Mario Kart Super Circuit

■ DEVELOPER: **Intelligent Systems** ■ GENRE: **Racing** ■ YEAR: **2001**



When *Super Mario Kart* first graced our consoles in 1992, no home console was capable of anything like the rotating racetracks it displayed. Less than a decade later, the flagship technique best known as Mode 7 was positively retro, swept aside by the full-3D visuals of the 32-bit and 64-bit consoles. With a bit of programming wizardry, the GBA was capable of polygonal magic too – yet *Mario Kart Super Circuit* stuck resolutely to the flat racetracks of its SNES forebear.

That appeal to retro sensibilities was key to the appeal of *Mario Kart Super Circuit*. The original game is one of the most beloved racers of all time, and there was far more value in tapping into that than making a cut-back 3D racer.

Mario Kart Super Circuit doesn't include any new items, and the character roster is carried over from *Mario Kart 64*. What it does have is 20 new racetracks to conquer, each of which is designed to the standards of the original game. Once you're done with those, you can revisit the 20 tracks from *Super Mario Kart* as well.

Mario Kart Super Circuit didn't need to reinvent the wheel, and doesn't. It just provides a whole bunch of new content for a formula that worked very well to begin with, and does so in a package you can fit in your jeans. The Game Boy Advance has a superb reputation for games that play to and build upon your nostalgia, and *Mario Kart Super Circuit* is one of the reasons why.







WAR HAS NEVER BEEN **SO CUTE**

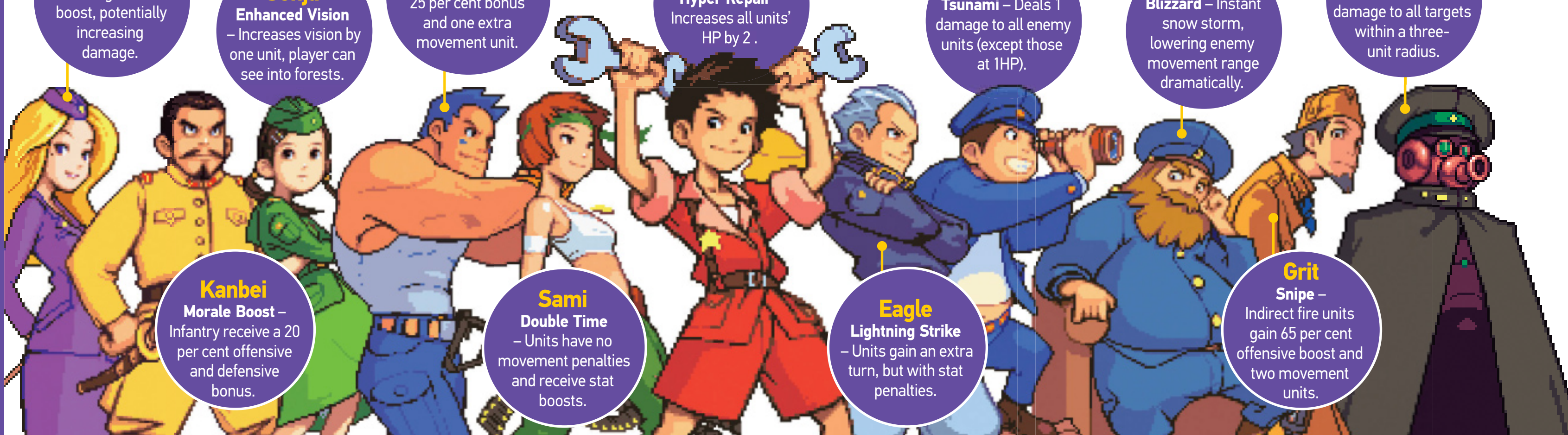
2 Advance Wars

■ DEVELOPER: **Intelligent Systems** ■ GENRE: **Strategy** ■ YEAR: **2001**



Up until the launch of the Game Boy Advance, a lot of Intelligent Systems' excellent work in the turn-based strategy genre was unfamiliar to most players outside of Japan – there were six *Wars* games prior to *Advance Wars*. Still, the developer quickly made up for lost time. *Advance Wars*' dinky-looking tanks and cutesy soldiers provided a universal appeal, with accessible yet deep strategic gameplay to back it up. With a lengthy single-player campaign, excellent multiplayer component and a range of commanding officers, each with their own unique powers to utilise, *Advance Wars* will keep your inner strategic general satisfied for ages. You can read about the COs and their powers below.





Nell
Lucky Star – All units gain a luck boost, potentially increasing damage.

Sonja
Enhanced Vision – Increases vision by one unit, player can see into forests.

Max
Max Power – Direct fire units get 25 per cent bonus and one extra movement unit.

Andy
Hyper Repair – Increases all units' HP by 2 .

Drake
Tsunami – Deals 1 damage to all enemy units (except those at 1HP).

Olaf
Blizzard – Instant snow storm, lowering enemy movement range dramatically.

Sturm
Meteor Strike – A strike deals 4HP damage to all targets within a three-unit radius.

Kanbei
Morale Boost – Infantry receive a 20 per cent offensive and defensive bonus.

Sami
Double Time – Units have no movement penalties and receive stat boosts.

Eagle
Lightning Strike – Units gain an extra turn, but with stat penalties.

Grit
Snipe – Indirect fire units gain 65 per cent offensive boost and two movement units.



FUSING OLD AND NEW

1 Metroid Fusion

■ DEVELOPER: Nintendo R&D1 ■ GENRE: Action-adventure ■ YEAR: 2002

The Game Boy Advance was one of the very first platforms to recognise and cater to nostalgic gamers in a big way, and this list is all the evidence you need to support that. Conversions and remakes of Eighties and Nineties games make up a fifth of the list, and that's a trend that continues right through the voting – for example, games that narrowly missed the cut include the likes of *Doom* and *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*. But the true appeal of the Game Boy Advance wasn't that it housed a fine retro library in your pocket – it was the fact that it offered a home to classic 2D game designs that had become lost in the home console world.

That's why *Metroid Fusion* is so brilliant. After Samus Aran's eight-year absence as a star character, Nintendo could have provided us with a simple conversion of *Super Metroid* and most people would have been happy. Instead, the developer went one better and delivered a true successor, a brand-new adventure created with the design sensibilities of the SNES classic.

Like its predecessors, *Metroid Fusion* is an exploratory platformer that places Samus alone in a hostile environment. The Biologic Space Laboratories research station has been overrun by the deadly X parasite, and Samus has to investigate what's happening and ultimately stop it. Of course, since she's lost all of her powers due to her own X infection, Samus must reacquire powers like the missiles and iconic Morph Ball in order to progress through the station.

Metroid Fusion doesn't allow for quite the same level of freedom and sequence-breaking as its predecessors, but the trade-off is a stronger narrative and a much more impressive atmosphere. In a large part, this can be credited to the SA-X, a ruthless and intelligent foe that stalks Samus throughout the game. While all of the encounters with it are scripted events, playing through for the first time and not knowing when you're going to be ambushed by a foe that can outgun you makes for some very real tension.

There's no area that *Metroid Fusion* doesn't excel in. It looks lovely, with vibrant colours and detailed sprites. It sounds great, with ominous music accompanying your every step. It plays superbly, with tight controls and excellent stage design. It wasn't necessarily the game we expected to top this list, but there's no denying that it deserves to.









ICONIC VILLAIN: SA-X

We extrapolate why Metroid Fusion's antagonist is so iconic

STAGE 1

■ The SA-X was formed from parts of Samus Aran's old Power Suit, which had been surgically removed and sent to quarantine after both she and the suit had been infected with the X parasite.

STAGE 2

■ The X parasites can obtain the physical appearance, intelligence and memories of their hosts, and even mimic technology. Thus, the SA-X is essentially a clone of a fully-powered Samus Aran, with all of her characteristic abilities and weaponry.

STAGE 3

■ Metroids are the natural predators of X parasites. Samus was cured with a treatment made from Metroid cells, and she's taken on some of its biological traits – most notably, weakness to the cold. The SA-X can detect this and will fight you with the Ice Beam.

STAGE 4

■ During your initial encounters with the SA-X, you'll be no match for it – you'll either have to hide in an inaccessible area or simply run like hell, dodging and weaving through the environment as it unleashes the full force of Samus' arsenal.

STAGE 5

■ While the SA-X attacks in the same places during every game, there's often basically no warning that it's coming, so you feel truly hunted by this creature. As soon as you spot it, it's time to take action or you are dead meat.

STAGE 6

■ X parasites can reproduce asexually, and that means that SA-X isn't necessarily a singular foe. There could be two, 20, 200 or even more – and if a single one escapes the research station, it'll kick off an enormous galactic plague. Good luck!



» RETROREVIVAL

Blood Money

WORTH WAITING FOR A BUS FOR



» AMIGA » DMA DESIGN » 1989

I was mesmerised by *Blood Money.* Whenever I caught the bus home from Parkstone the stop we always waited at was right outside Densham Computers. Needless to say I would constantly badger my mum to go inside, which rarely happened as we were waiting for the bus. Being unable to go inside, I would instead simply gaze into the shop window, wistfully looking at whatever home computers and consoles were being showed off.

While I vaguely remember seeing a Master System displaying *Enduro Racer*, my most vivid memories of these cold waits were gazing in wonder at the Amiga and seeing the astonishing looking *Blood Money*. All I could remember was that it looked every bit as good as the shooters that I played in Poole Quay Amusements, and that when you shot down enemies they would burst into coins. Granted it wasn't anything that I'd never seen in the arcade before, but I couldn't ever remember a home videogame looking that good and I desperately wanted my own Amiga.

When I eventually picked up an Amiga, it was one of the first games I tracked down. I soon discovered that it didn't play quite as good as it looked (an issue I've had with a lot of western-developed shoot-'em-ups) but that it was a resoundingly solid shooter and one of my favourite on the Amiga (I never played the ST version which I imagine was released first). I also discovered that the helicopter is just one of four forms that you could take throughout the game – the others being a submarine, jet and jet pack. In short, I guess what I'm trying to say is that good things always come to those who wait. *


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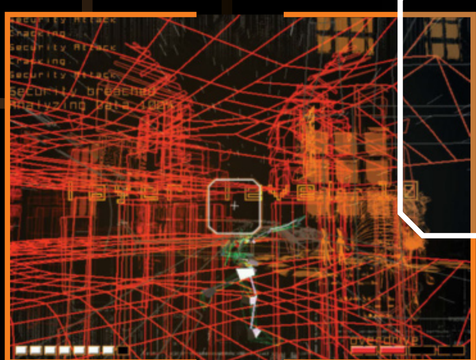
Rez

there are many words that can be used to describe tetsuya mizuguchi's classic, but not one that does it justice. well, perhaps there is one…

Synaesthesia (n) [sĭn′ĭs-thē′zhə] 1. Sensory overlap whereby it is possible to experience stimuli through different sensations than usually expected, i.e.: the ability to hear colours or see sounds. 2. The core concept behind a cult Dreamcast shooter. 3. A long word that makes you sound smarter than you probably actually are. We'll be mainly dealing with the second of these points today but in order to do so, it's important to understand the concept behind the first part as well. After all, without it, *Rez* simply wouldn't be the game it is – a sensory feast that demands to be played in the right conditions. So kill the lights, crank the volume and let's do this.

Rez's working title of *K-Project* was a reference to a Russian artist by the name of Wassily Kandinsky, a painter known for his abstract works in the early 20th Century. Kandinsky's creations were often based on synaesthetic principle, the idea that visual stimulus could allow the viewer to *hear* what they saw or at very least could experience how colour, shape and sound (or indeed the visual implication of it) could connect into one sensory explosion, something *Rez*'s producer and creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi was clearly keen to replicate when creating *Rez* – legitimately one of the strongest arguments for videogames as a true art form as exists today.

At its core, it's the simple mechanics of *Rez* that allow it to be such an audiovisual feast. It uses only directional control – used to move the targeting reticule and to angle the camera to a degree – and two buttons, one for regular shots and one reserved for the panic button that is Overdrive, a smart bomb that damages all targets in view and grants temporary



» [Dreamcast] Each layer gets more elaborate the deeper you go. The recently released VR version is even more of a head rush.



» [Dreamcast] You should always be looking to increase your multiplier, a lone enemy won't net you many points…



Form Factor

level 00



■ A simple ball made out of triangles. As the most fragile state, a single hit here will end your run prematurely, so have your thumb ready to reach for the Overdrive button at all times, just in case.

SHOT TYPE: Simple beams that arc towards enemies.

level 01



■ The iconic default form on starting a fresh run, built from flat squares. It effectively gives you one hit of armour before you're in real danger, although its pulse is among the most satisfying so it's almost sad to leave it behind.

SHOT TYPE: Basic lasers that shoot straight to their targets.

level 02



■ Somewhere between wireframe and polygonal forms, this evolution hints at the next stage while offering a moderate degree of protection while having one of the strangest shot effects.

SHOT TYPE: Fires a stream of gaseous pulses along a targeting beam.

level 03



■ With full polygonal smoothness achieved, you're ready for anything… well, anything except for taking four hits, at least. A good safety net to aim for when tackling bosses, especially the tricky Tera variants.

SHOT TYPE: Wide beams that track their targets by travelling at right angles.

level 04



■ Perform well enough and your reward is a polygonal sphere in which to meditate as you travel. While the shell serves as a shield, losing it will revert you to the former white avatar rather than your meditative red one.

SHOT TYPE: Fires beams from the sphere's panels that head directly for targets.

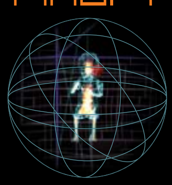
level 05



■ Finally, transcendence has been achieved. Leaving behind your humanoid form for this pulsating sphere-thing is strange at first. But knowing that it means you're doing really well makes it all worthwhile.

SHOT TYPE: Summons lasers from all over to strike and penetrate targets.

Final Form



■ You'll automatically ascend to this ultimate form upon reaching Eden, and you'll need it – while evolution items are available in the final boss rush, getting through five big bads in a row is no joke.

SHOT TYPE: Penetrating beams that target enemies from all directions.

▶ invulnerability in times of need. That said, the game's presentation can be seen as just as simple. Liberal use of wireframes and flat-shaded polygons allows plenty of room for artistic interpretation and makes the action easy to follow, not to mention ensuring that it all runs smoothly (relatively, at least – a locked 30fps on Dreamcast, a relatively steady 60fps on PS2 and locked 60fps or higher on later releases) even on the relatively modest Dreamcast hardware. As avatars, environments and even the HUD pulse in time with the music, everything is made to feel interconnected – you can see the beat, track progress and achievements sonically and even feel the music with the right setup, whether that's the Trance Vibrator peripheral released later (and only in Japan) for PS2, additional controllers for the modern rereleases or just an obnoxiously powerful subwoofer.

Framed as a voyage into a supercomputer attempting to shut itself down after become self-aware, *Rez* showcases a level of synergy between visuals, sounds and physical stimuli far beyond anything else the medium has to offer. Whereas similar rail shooters like *Panzer Dragoon* and indeed even most older 2D shooters offer immediate player feedback when an



» [Dreamcast] Even in the original Dreamcast and PS2 versions, the sense of scale is still impressive.



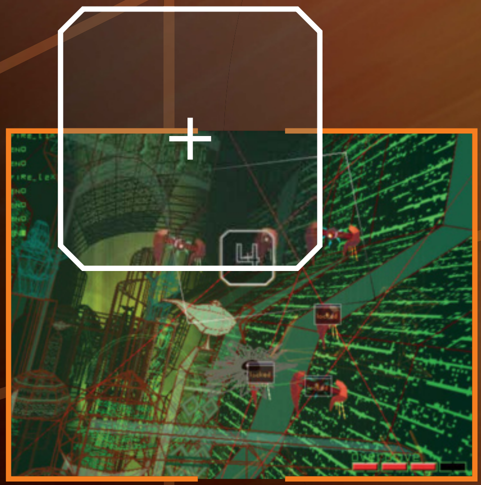
» [Dreamcast] This boss is a right pain as it spawns annoying yellow spores that prove tough to shake.

> "our objective was to give the player the feeling of being in a different world"
>
> Katsumi Yokota

enemy is destroyed, *Rez* instead delays and offsets such feedback so that it synchronises with the beat of the underlying music, which changes with each stage. The result is that everything is uniform – while the patterns produced might be slightly unusual, their place within the rhythm, whether on the beat or off it, is guaranteed. Couple this with the gorgeous visual eruptions that occur after hits and kills and any beat-based rumbling that may be going on and the effect is complete, giving players the sensation of impact on the world via up to three senses at once (we've never smelled nor tasted a game, nor do we ever wish to) and in the process blurring the three into one incredible experience, especially when the game is all you can see, hear and feel. See why we said to kill the lights now?

Ingeniously, this sensation is grown and evolved, cultivated rather than being dumped on players from the off. Each stage starts with just a simple beat, during which time enemy kills and lock-ons naturally have a much more significant impact on the soundscape. As more and more patterns and instruments are layered on with each passing wave, this feeling of control, of real impact on this virtual world, never lessens – in fact it grows, the underlying soundtrack's gradual evolution brought on via controller input, if not quite so directly controlled as the backing track booms later in a level and you're left just adding flourishes here and there. But it never feels like that. Having been allowed to plant the rhythmic seeds at the start, you assume ownership over the musical crops that grow from them and the whole journey is that much more engaging as a result. It's not a complete misnomer, either – the countless permutations of lock-on and shot timings mean no two playthroughs of any given level are ever likely to sound exactly the same, as similar as they may look.

Escalation is a key theme here, not just within levels themselves but also over the course of the entire game. Traditional game design dictates a need for an increase in challenge in response to progress and fortunately, that ties into the formula of other media as well – whether it's the crescendo of a musical piece or a build-up to a big story reveal, escalation is a classic way of securing involvement in a piece. You want to see the payoff and in *Rez*'s case, that payoff is utterly glorious. When you feel like things might have peaked with Area 4's intense 'running man' boss battle, ▶



» [Dreamcast] Collecting blue orbs allows you to eventually evolve your form, and with it, your actual shooting capabilities.



» [Dreamcast] Here's all the important info you need, including how many items you've found and the name of the artist involved.

run-int-yokota

art director katsumi yokota tells all

Tell us about your involvement with *Rez*.
I presented my overall art direction ideas to the designers, and then made the necessary adjustments in order to maintain a consistent world setting and graphical style. I was also responsible for the player character design, the HUD design, and the background level design for Area 1 and Area 5. There were six designers, and each was responsible for the art design and data creation for different parts. My job was to provide the key words and concepts, and each designer then thought about and created their own data based on these key concepts.

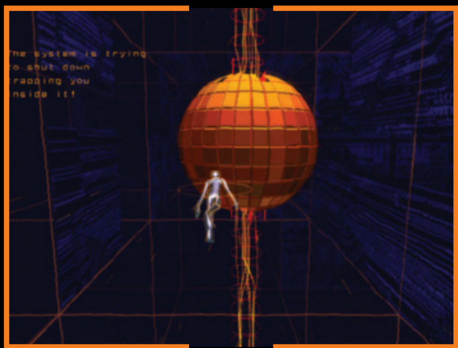
What makes *Rez* different from the likes of *Panzer Dragoon*?
In the case of *Rez*, we had to display lots of visual feedback to match the timing of the sound and music. Even matching small effects at the edge of the screen to the music could result in a mismatch between the visuals and the feelings experienced from the sound. The sound would provide a stronger impression; however, the visuals would end up not matching up. So, it was necessary to create large visual effects that encompassed the entire screen, but in order to maintain the overall visibility required for a shooting game, we had to display these large effects in the background, at the 'back' of the screen. This way, the effects never blocked the view of enemies attacking, et cetera. However, sometimes the background objects at the front would overlap the graphic effects. By drawing these objects using the wireframe techniques, we were able to display both the background objects and the effects at the same time.

How did *Rez*'s unique visuals come about?
As a creator, using the latest technology [at the time] on the Dreamcast and PS2 to create these sort of 'retro' graphics was quite interesting, and I believe that there were many players at the time who also felt the same. For *Panzer Dragoon*, the design work was focused on expressing a fictional world in the most realistic fashion. Our objective was to give the player the feeling of being in a different world, filled with living, breathing characters with their own lives. *Rez* was focused on creating a feeling of constant link between the sound and the visuals, and I think we used the best methods to achieve this.

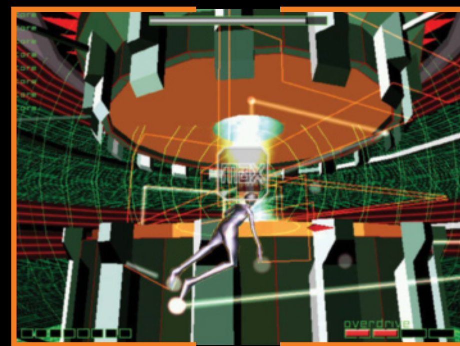
How did you make the levels stand apart?
The five stages were created using the same methodology. Although the music and backgrounds are different in each stage, the way each stage was created was the same – each stage is constructed using wireframe graphics with a graphical effect layer at the very back. We used this method because we were unable to synchronize the visuals and the in-game sounds using any other method. Only Area 5 was created a little differently. In order to differentiate each stage we applied a specific keyword, and in this case we used themes from four ancient civilizations – Egypt, Mesopotamia, Indus, and Hwang Ho. In addition, in every area we displayed characteristic, representational objects in order to more effectively differentiate each stage. If we hadn't used these techniques and keywords when creating the stages I think it would have been very difficult to convey our ideas to the player. Geometric structures moving to the music, and the combination of representational objects based on these ancient civilizations enabled us to achieve our goal of clearly differentiating each stage.

boss rush

a closer look at the primary firewalls







earth

AREA 1, EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION

■ As its name suggests, Earth is a spherical foe that should probably be destroyed. Rip through the outer casing and you'll find a spinning core with tendrils that can also fire shots, although most of these will miss you. Ignore the warning shots and put the hurt on the core, while dealing with any mines or shots that do look like they could ruin your day.

mars

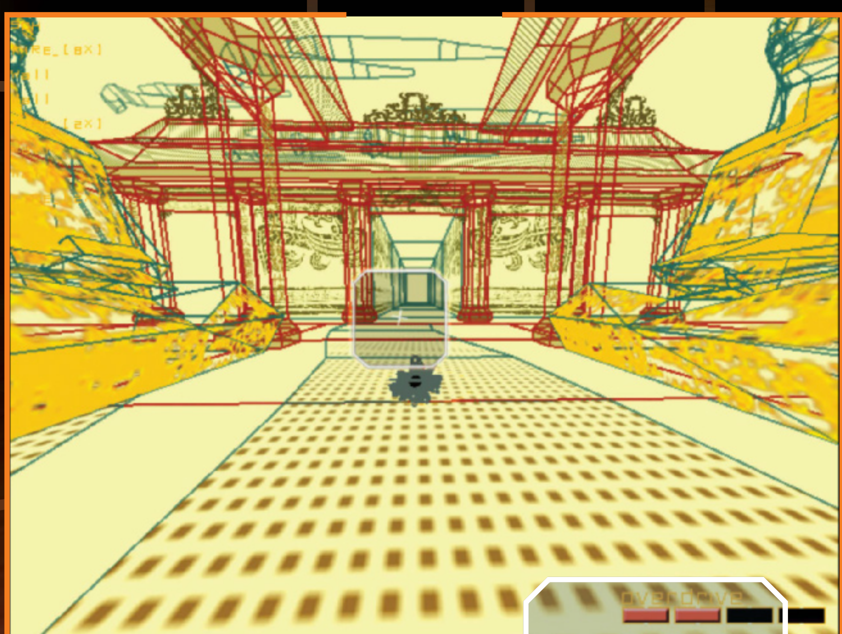
AREA 2, INDIAN CIVILIZATION

■ Creative liberty didn't end with giving Earth tendrils – apparently, Mars is made of the bloody things. Well, those and annoying formations of blocks that must be destroyed before you can damage the core. Watch for big blocks and their rotations, then be ready to focus fire on the ends of the protrusions as they light up, then burn the core again.

venus

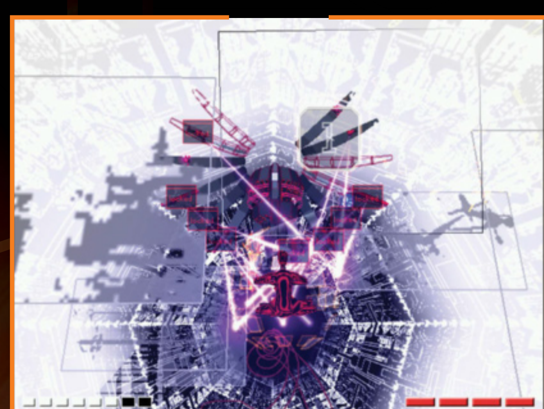
AREA 3, MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATION

■ A three-phase fight. Start by taking down the lasers on the shell (prioritising those that glow red) then just melt all of the red-lit banks on the tower, using Overdrive to avoid being swarmed as needed. The final phase is easy – aim top-left and move between missiles and weak points, focusing fire on the core whenever it opens.

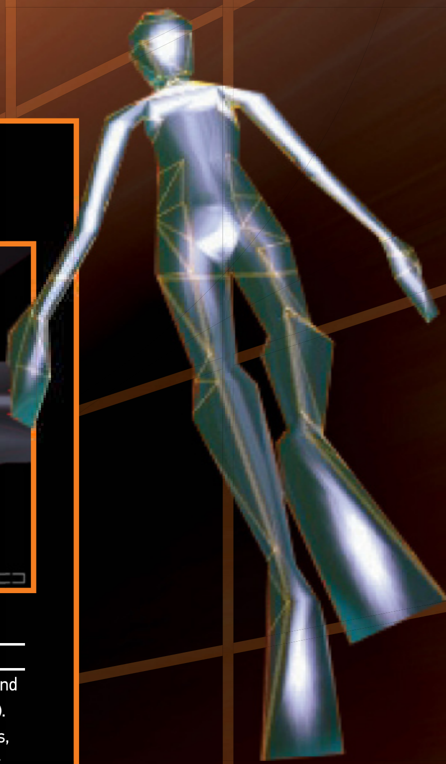


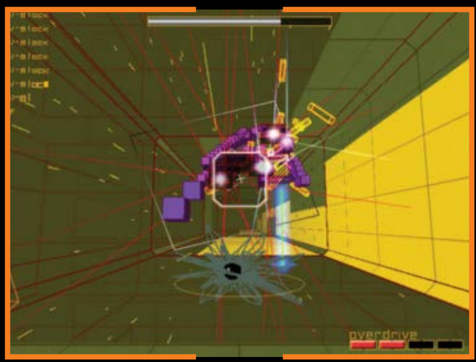
» [Dreamcast] For some reason this section of Area 4 always reminds us of the graphics from the old quiz show *Blockbusters*. Don't ask us why.

▶ complete decryption of all four areas unlocks a fifth, and it's not like the others. Gone is the ten-zone structure and the need to chase down the password protectors that gate progress through earlier levels, but gone too is the sanctity of the wireframe world you've been inhabiting all this time. The closer you get to Eden, to the AI core, the more things start to push back and between the visuals jumping between grids and full (albeit basic) 3D, the new gating system and the evolutionary tale that plays out around you both thematically and mechanically, it's genuinely one of the greatest videogame levels ever created and, for fear of labouring the point, an incredible artistic achievement. And when that sample from Marlena Shaw's *California Soul* drops, it just makes for an utterly incredible moment and one that we'll never forget.



» [Dreamcast] You can't hear it here, but Area 5's *F.E.A.R.* sounds incredible. In fact, we're humming along to it as we type this out.





uranus

AREA 4, CHINESE CIVILIZATION

■ We barely have space to go into the intricacies of this, but blasting open new paths at the right time can be a lifesaver. Aim for any part that glows in order to avoid damage, while picking off other parts as best you can to avoid having to break them later. Its leaping attacks aren't as scary as they seem and can be easily avoided if you break the blocks that might hit you.



eden

AREA 5, BIRTH

■ This stage ends in an epic boss rush (that can be unlocked and played separately if you get a 95 per cent shot rate in all areas). It's essentially slightly different variants of the first four bosses, but culminates in an attempt to rescue Eden who is slowly put back together as you blast the sentinels and concentric rings that surround her. It's a draining session, so save those Overdrives.

"in the case of rez, we had to display feedback to match the timing of sound"

Katsumi Yokota

Even if you were to derail the Art Train and discuss *Rez* purely as a videogame, you'd struggle to avoid pulling into Hyperbole Central. Scores are hidden during regular play so as to allow the experience to enjoy centre stage, although that isn't to say that the scoring system isn't up to scratch. Quite the opposite, in fact – by allowing players to earn point multipliers based on total lock-ons before firing, a risk/reward mechanic is born that promotes pushing the limits of patience and willpower in order to score big while not allowing enemies to flee the screen or wreak too much havoc without being blasted. Casual play and score attack play look *very* different and strategies that work in one mindset absolutely do not apply to the other. So while you'd usually eliminate a foe before it can open fire in a regular session, a score attack runner will see an enemy projectile not as the pitiful ten-point boost it grants and extra trouble it creates but as an additional multiplier, taking them one step closer to the coveted eight-way shot that earns the most points.

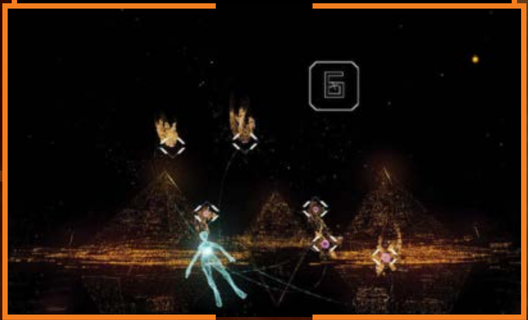
Amazingly, this even extends to bosses, the dynamic difficulty scaling quite easily manipulated when you know the rules. Hit more than 98 per cent of hostiles and you'll face the super-hard Tera version of a boss, braving significantly tougher and quicker attack patterns for a respectable score boost. Giga variants replace them in the event of less impressive enemy clearance, with the weakest Mega versions of each also on hand in case you should leave too many enemies alive en route to the boss. That's not always a bad plan, though – if you're just hitting Direct Assault mode to unlock new stuff, the quicker and easier option is always going to be preferable to that which would score you most points in a mode where points don't matter, and some of the Tera bosses are *hard*. Seriously.

Rez isn't something anyone should experience parts of in isolation. It's a game that deserves, nay demands, to be played from start to finish. In the dark. Loud. In one sitting. It's not like it takes long – around an hour on a decent run, once you understand its basic rules – and it's more than likely to leave an impression. Whether you cherish it as an amazing gaming experience, a peerless sensory assault or a piece of interactive art doesn't matter. All that matters is that you cherish it. *

vr is the mind killer

what's new in rez infinite?

The latest revision of *Rez* launched alongside PlayStation VR, although you may be glad to hear that you don't need the headset to appreciate everything it has to offer. Presented in 1080p, silky smooth and with all unlockables intact, it's the best way to experience the game today, at least in a traditional sense – virtual reality adds a whole new dimension to the game that it obviously wasn't designed for yet still manages to benefit from. The new Area X is the only addition, although offering full-3D movement and a similarly satisfying sense of escalation, it's an amazing addition to the package – an amazing journey improved by, but not requiring, VR that updates the art style and goes nuts with particle effects to make it feel like you're flying through a fireworks display of your own creation.





"I've always liked board games and Dungeon & Dragons. I saw the computer as being like a dungeon master"

Paul Clansey

FIRST JOB
Clerical assistant

CURRENT JOB
Retired

FAVOURITE FILM
Quartermass And The Pit

FAVOURITE ALBUM
Sheikh Yerbouti - Frank Zappa

FAVOURITE BOOK:
Empire Of The Clouds: When Britain's Aircraft Ruled The World

FIRST COMPUTER/CONSOLE
ZX Spectrum

FAVOURITE COMPUTER/CONSOLE
C64

BEST GAMING ACHIEVEMENT
Getting *Miami Vice* done in eight weeks

BEST-SELLING PRODUCT:
Alien

BEST HOLIDAY
My honeymoon in Tuscany

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH
I have to say my wife, she'll be checking. And my dog, too!

161-0681051030320681171O3

SEX
M

NAME
Paul Clansey

DATE OF BIRTH
1961

PLACE OF BIRTH
Aintree, Liverpool

BIOGRAPHY
Paul was at Imagine Software when it imploded, jointly founded development studio Concept, and produced games for various software houses during the 8-bit era, including Ocean and Argus Press.

Paul Clansey

What cherished games would you take to the island?

The British software scene of the Eighties was a creative and cutthroat world and Paul Clansey was in the thick of it. He tells Paul Drury about aliens, 8-bits and, erm, Gazza

He may have been born within earshot of the famous Grand National course at Aintree but for Paul Clansey, it was the noise of another kind of steeplechase that captured his imagination. "Liverpool seemed like the centre of the software universe in the Eighties," says Paul in his chirpy scouse twang. "It was like the second coming of The Beatles. I was so close to lots of people who got famous or rich out of it… though it never quite touched me."

Paul may not have come away with the prize money, but he was certainly part of the pack racing to make games for the burgeoning home computer market. His eventful career saw him work at Imagine and Ocean, big beasts in the northwest's software scene, and though his ride was seldom smooth, Paul thinks of his decade-long spell in the industry with fondness. "I was in my twenties, a naive young man just setting out in the world, and it seemed like it was full of opportunities. That might seem surprising, given all the setbacks and software houses going bust around me, but it was just a really exciting time."

Like so many stories, it began with his mum buying him a ZX Spectrum. Paul had graduated from Lancaster University with a degree in Environmental Science in 1982 but the tough economic environment in Liverpool at the time meant he found himself unemployed. Sinclair's petite box of tricks gave him a focus and he soon produced *Trax!*, a clone of coin-op *Side Track*. The game was picked up by publishers Soft Joe and they lent Paul a C64 to produce a version for Commodore's machine, too, which soon became his computer of choice. When Soft Joe – which turned out to just be a couple of likely lads trying their luck in the publishing business – ceased trading, Paul decided to duplicate and distribute *Trax!* himself. "I employed an artist and did a full-colour cassette inlay," he says. "I'm not saying it was a great game but it did look professional for the time. And I made a few grand… enough to pay my mum back for the Spectrum!"

Paul also dropped a copy off at the newly-founded Imagine Software, like a calling card, and it proved enough for the Liverpool-based company with big ambitions to offer him a job as an in-house programmer. His first task was to code the C64 release of the Dave Lawson-designed *Cosmic Cruiser* alongside the Spectrum version. Was he slightly frustrated not to be working on his own concept? "It did feel like a step back," he admits, "but on the other hand, I was so grateful to have, what I thought, was a job for life!"

Sadly, things didn't quite pan out that way. After early success with titles such as *Arcadia* and *Zzoom!*, Imagine struck a reputed six-figure deal with publisher Marshall Cavendish to deliver new games on a regular monthly basis. Imagine duly took on a slew of extra staff but it soon emerged that producing quality titles to such a punishing schedule was a far greater challenge than the company had anticipated. "I think Marshall Cavendish started to have doubts that Imagine, or indeed anyone, could churn out two games a month for the next three years," explains Paul. "One of our managers heard they were on their way to make a 'surprise visit', so he desperately rang round and got six or so of us to come into work that evening. He kept telling us, 'They'll be here any minute!' but as it went past midnight, we wanted to fall asleep, so someone, who shall remain nameless, offered some 'medication' to keep us going through the night. I entered into the spirit and unsurprisingly, we perked up and got a bit giddy. We were all chatting away and work stopped completely. When the buzz died down, we all felt really sleepy. By the time Marshall Cavendish turned up the next morning, I was asleep under my desk and woke to see two pairs of shiny shoes – it was Bruce [Everiss], our marketing manager, telling one of the Marshall Cavendish

Trivia

As part of his degree, Paul studied Planetary Science, a fact much emphasised in the fancy fold-out cassette inlay for *Cosmic Cruiser*.



Game Over caught the public eye when Ocean showed a nipple in its magazine advert.

Praise for Paul

Here's what **Retro Gamer** has to say about Paul Clansey's work...



Darran Jones
As I never owned a C64 until very late, a lot of Paul's games passed me by. I do remember playing a lot of *Game Over* on the Amstrad though, and after having a discussion with Nick, it was every bit as tough on the Commodore 64 as it was on the Amstrad. It apparently sounded a lot better, too.



Paul Drury
The Eighties was such an exciting time for the UK software industry, so to speak to someone right there amongst the brilliance and bankruptcies was a real pleasure. Paul produced some solid C64 conversions but his most interesting work is probably his strategy titles, *Alien* and *The Force*, which showed an ambition beyond the humble hardware.

directors, 'Look, our programmers have been working through the night…'"

Even Bruce's impressive spin couldn't prevent Marshall Cavendish pulling the plug on the lucrative deal but Imagine kept on the huge number of new staff and remained in its fancy offices, assuming they could still knock out hit games to order. Paul began work on a title called *Mythos*, featuring a winged horse flying between floating islands in the clouds, but he didn't get far beyond some basic animation routines. When the bailiffs did arrive to call time on the business, as infamously captured in the BBC's *Commercial Breaks* documentary, Paul was there – in fact, it was he and colleague Mark Dawson that had brought in the *American Werewolf In London* video that Bruce comments the staff were watching that fateful morning as the axe fell.

"I remember thinking it was weird a manager of the company was showing round a film crew when Imagine was in such a predicament," sighs Paul, "but I think Bruce just wanted maximum publicity and to make it clear he wasn't responsible. I don't blame him."

The sharp-eyed can spot Paul in the documentary, fleetingly, discussing *Bandersnatch* graphics with Ian Weatherburn and Gill Stopp. His work on *Mythos* remained on the hard drives seized by the bailiffs and he was left jobless but teamed up with Roy Gibson, Steve Ward and Simon Bell to found their own company, Concept. "Making games was all I knew how to do," he grins. "We were confident, naively perhaps, that we'd be able to get the work in."

And they did. Roy used his contacts to negotiate a deal with Argus Press and along with contributing music to games

> "Liverpool seemed like the centre of the software universe in the Eighties"
>
> *Paul Clansey*

such as *Mission Omega* and unlikely film tie-in *Give My Regards To Broad Street*, he designed and coded a trio of original strategy games for the C64. *Evil Crown* cast you as a feudal lord, assigning your peasants to harvesting, building or soldiering tasks in proto-*Civilisation* fashion. *The Force*, released in 1986, put you in charge of a different kind of fiefdom as you co-ordinated a local constabulary, assigning your boys and girls in blue to patrol the various potential crime hotspots in your patch. "That was done in consultation with the Metropolitan Police," reports Paul. "They gave us all these documents but then told us we had to keep quiet [about the game] as they couldn't be seen to be supporting us! They did tell us afterwards they thought we'd done a pretty accurate simulation of managing a police force."

It was an interesting concept for a game at the time, and Paul's strategic inclinations continued on, which is evident in his highest-profile title. "I was gobsmacked they got the licence for *Alien*," says Paul. "I wanted to recreate the tension of the film, so I tried to make it minimalistic, with just a heartbeat and the sound of grates opening in the background. I've always liked board games and things like *Dungeon & Dragons* – I saw the computer as being like a dungeon master. The problem with my games is you had to read the manual, which was unrealistic back then."

The Concept team also sought to learn from the downfall of their previous employer. They rented cheap offices, paid

Paul handled several footy games during his career, including Super Soccer.



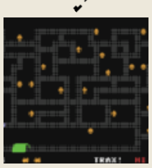


» [C64] *Legend Of Kage* was Paul's only official coin-op conversion

Timeline

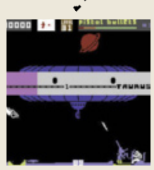
1983

TRAX!
■ **YEAR:** 1983
■ **FORMAT:** ZX Spectrum/C64
Paul's first published game was this simple but competent spin on Exidy's coin-op *Side Track*, which had steamed into arcades the previous year.



1984

COSMIC CRUISER
■ **YEAR:** 1984
■ **FORMAT:** C64
Blasting the windows out of a spaceship to free your fellow astronauts becomes strangely compelling in Paul's pastel-coloured space rescue game.



1984

ALIEN
■ **YEAR:** 1984
■ **FORMAT:** C64
The visuals may be functional but there's great atmosphere and depth to Paul's take on being trapped in a spaceship with an alien horror.

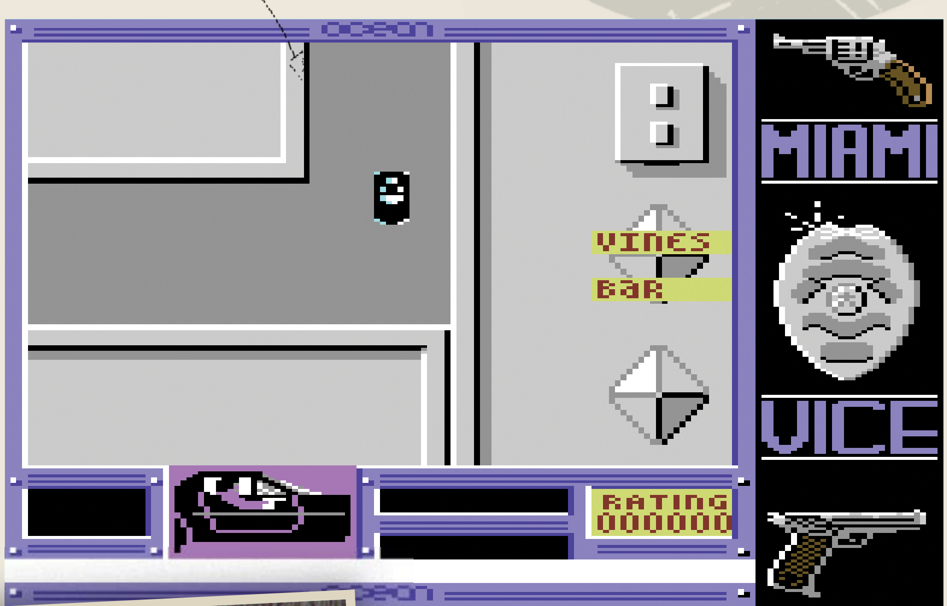


1986

TIME TRAX
■ **YEAR:** 1986
■ **FORMAT:** C64
A polished arcade adventure with lots of secrets and time portals to discover, though slightly marred by the trial-and-error nature of exploration.



Miami Vice was another of Ocean's TV tie-ins.





She's Behind You...

To promote the release of Alien, Argus Press arranged for a series of photographs to be taken and sent out to magazines, eventually appearing in *Crash* and *Zzap!64*. "When we got told we could use the costume from the film, we were dead excited," Paul smiles, "but when it arrived, we realised it must have been made for some seven-foot-tall man who was about two inches wide. The only bit we could use was the hands. One of our lovely secretaries donned these rubber hands on and put them all over me. If you look at the 'behind the scenes' photo, you'll see the 'alien' is in fact wearing a red dress!"

themselves modestly, nabbed Quicksilva's furniture for free when the publisher went bust, used actual C64s and Spectrums to code on rather than development kits and aimed to avoid the excesses of Imagine in its self-indulgent pomp. A sensible decision, though Paul believes it ultimately meant several of their employees, including talented coders like John Heap, were easily seduced by the more opulent set up of nearby Denton Designs. Unable to hold on to staff, the founders dissolved the company and Paul went freelance.

The commercial success of his game version of the first film meant Paul received an early copy of the script for the sequel, *Aliens*, while it was still in production and started to sketch out designs before Argus informed him they'd been outbid for the license this time. Instead, Paul began work on an idea of his own. *Time Trax* was a detailed arcade adventure set in a post-apocalyptic world and entailed much time-hopping to defeat 'the Evil Ones'. It was well received by *Zzap!64* magazine who gave it 80% overall, though reviewer Gary Penn noted it was a difficult game to get to grips with.

"I think I polished it as much as I could but I do wish I'd tuned it more," he sighs. "It's a flaw in many of my games. I prefer writing games to playing them and that makes me rubbish as a playtester. They're bug-free but often aren't easy to play. I had *Time Trax* all mapped out with hidden objects and time portals all over the place. Anyone who gets a decent score on it has my upmost respect because it must have taken an awful lot of time to work it all out…"

Having produced *Time Trax* for Mind Games, Paul struck a deal with Ocean in 1986 to handle a number of C64 ports over a 12-month period, including *Super Soccer*, a port of Taito's coin-op *Legend Of Kage* and *Miami Vice*. We wonder whether he coded in a white jacket with the sleeves rolled up, just to get in to that Crockett and Tubbs state of mind?

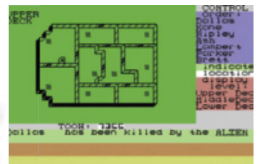
Clansey on Clansey

Paul picks his three favourite projects



■ COSMIC CRUISER

The only game I completed at Imagine. The design was Dave Lawson's so my creativity was limited but I am fond of it by association with the great time I had at Imagine.



■ ALIEN

We got the official licence so I thought I'd hit the jackpot (my bank balance has since disproved that assumption). The music seems to have gained a cult following.



■ TIME TRAX

All my own work and the first time I felt able to put everything I wanted to in. I was especially pleased with the music, which I originally wrote for *Mission Omega*.



Paul's cramped work setup during the making of Gazza 2.

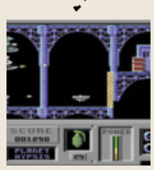
1986

MIAMI VICE
■ **YEAR:** 1986
■ **FORMAT:** C64
Paul handled a few conversions for Ocean during its 'any licence will do' period, including this 'commute to a meeting, wearing a white suit' simulator.



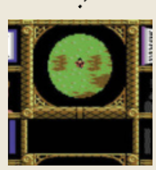
1987

GAME OVER
■ **YEAR:** 1987
■ **FORMAT:** C64
It may be remembered for that 'popping out' magazine advert, but this is a varied flick-screen run-and-gun game, perhaps a little too tough for its own good.



1987

WIZARD WARZ
■ **YEAR:** 1987
■ **FORMAT:** C64
Paul's only title during his short sojourn at developers Canvas, the good ideas here are marred by ill-advised presentation. That map window is tiny…



1990

GAZZA 2
■ **YEAR:** 1990
■ **FORMAT:** C64
Paul's final release was this football game. It is better than *Peter Beardsley's International Soccer*, which is known as 'damning with faint praise'.



Readers' Questions

Northway: Why no work on the 16-bit machines?

I did have an Atari ST as a development machine but I was never tempted to write for it. A lot of people I knew got really excited when a new machine came out and were always looking for the next thing to move on to. I was the complete opposite. Once I'd gone through the painful process of working out how to do stuff on one computer, I was reluctant to invest the time and trouble to learn on a new one. That probably doomed me to having quite a short career.

Merman: Was it difficult creating the artificial intelligence for the characters in *Alien*?

I'm impressed someone has actually noticed that! Some people thought it was just marketing bluster. Because one of my interests was role-playing games, the AI was in it from the start. I was trying to match the characters from the film, so I'd have [attributes] like bravery, innovation, temper and also their relationships with each other.

Paranoid Marvin: Did you ever meet Paul McCartney?

No but my boss Ron Harris did. I did the *Band On The Run* theme song for *Give My Regards To Broad Street* but I couldn't read music back then so I think I got a few notes wrong. I thought it was awful but when Ron showed the game to Paul McCartney, he told me Paul said the music was very good! Then he added, 'Well, it is my tune.'

Northway: Has some of the creativity been lost since the age of Imagine and the early software houses?

Absolutely. As projects got bigger and you needed more money up front, people became more risk averse. When people were just churning stuff out at home, they could do whatever they fancied and every now and again bits of gold would turn up. And if you have a more limited machine, it forces you to be creative.

Merman: Do you have anything left of your unfinished games?

Yes! I've got several boxes of disks but I don't have any way of checking them. Frank Gasking [of gtw64.co.uk] has offered to help explore them as he's got access to lots of equipment. In fact, I've just found a disk claiming to be the master for Iron Hand!



The Force sadly didn't feature constables with Jedi powers.

> "I prefer writing games to playing them and that makes me rubbish as a playtester"
>
> *Paul Clansey*

"I did own a white jacket at that time," he laughs. "I wasn't the only one. Liverpool was full of them. I remember thinking I'd fallen on my feet *with Miami Vice*. The money was great and I did it in record time – eight weeks from start to finish!"

The decent financial rewards helped to make up for the slightly lonely life of a freelance game programmer. Even when he handled the C64 port of Game Over, best remembered for a protruding nipple in the magazine advert, he didn't keep abreast of the controversy. "I was oblivious," he chuckles. "I suppose that was clever marketing people again, making sure the game got some notoriety! I'm sorry to tar all Ocean's releases with the same brush but it did feel like they got a big licence, got someone to do excellent graphics, get someone like Dave Whittaker or Martin Galway to do excellent music and as long as it didn't fall over, the actual game wasn't that important. Perhaps they were just being lenient on me as the programmer. My niche became delivering quick. I was reliable but not technically innovative. Safe but not very inspiring.."

He's being overly modest but then solely handling conversions necessarily limits a coders creativity, which might explain Paul's decision to join old colleagues Ian Weatherburn and Gary Bolton at developers Canvas in 1987. That and the sweetener of a swanky company car. "The main reason I joined was they promised to get me a Sierra Cosworth," he grins. "They went bust within a year of me joining. Just when funds were getting desperately low, when a big cheque from a publisher bounced on them."

In his year with the short-lived Canvas, Paul's main project was *Wizard Warz*, a fantasy strategy title which fitted nicely with his enduring love of RPGs. He also completed *Iron Hand*, which seems to have been cracked and circulated by hacking crews, despite there being no apparent record of an official release.

With the demise of Canvas, Paul returned to freelancing, but the late Eighties soured into a series of unfinished and cancelled projects. There was ambitious *Civilisation*-meets-*Elite* 3D exploration game *Exodus* for the C64, *Heroquest* for publishers Gremlin, which ended up being given to a rival contractor, and even *Cowboy Pete* for the antiquated Atari 2600, none of which saw the light of day. Paul's final published game eventually hit the shelves in 1990 in the shape of *Gazza 2*, a football title which aimed to capitalise on the fame of the blubbing star of England's Italia '90 campaign, Paul Gascoigne. "My boss Dave Colley, who set up Active Minds, went to meet Gazza," recalls Paul. "We had the licence to use real player names for all the countries across Europe apart from Germany. I had a book about World War II which listed the high command of the German army so all the German players are taken from that. Which thinking about it, is a bit dodgy. I hope no-one thought I was a Nazi sympathiser..."

Unlike Gazza's world cup, Paul's career didn't end in tears, but in a sober decision. "I still feel bad about it, but after *Gazza 2*, they wanted me to do *Sword Of Abaddon*, which I started but was also applying for a sensible office job. I'd gone from the heights of running a company and then all the contract work and driving a nice car to struggling to pay the mortgage and not having a car at all."

As the new decade began, Paul secured a post as a Cobol programmer in the civil service, which he held throughout the Nineties, before working for a international IT company until taking early retirement five years ago. Since then, he has toyed with a return to games but recognises that coding is only a small part of making a game these days and it's not a one man job. "When I started out, I could implement everything myself for a game but I recognise now, you become a diminishing cog in a machine. It's not from any ego, it's just I was driven by wanting to produce my own creations. But you never know… maybe I could try a text adventure!" We say GET COMPUTER and MAKE GAME, Paul. *

Trivia

During his freelancing days in the Eighties, Paul produced a proto-screen saver for Crown Paints, which evolved into its 'painting by numbers' TV advert.



The shenanigans at Imagine Software even made the front page of the local paper.

Thanks to Frank Gasking at gtw64.co.uk for the introduction and Martyn and Kieren for additional help.

Paul Clansey

Desert Island Disks

The games that Paul simply couldn't live without

















01 Space Wars (ARCADE)
The vector graphics and movement impressed me as they were more sophisticated than other contemporary games. Some small compensation for being a student living in Morecambe off-season, at the time when I first came across computers – for more serious applications.

02 Forbidden Forest (C64)
My first purchase for the C64. In fact, my only purchase for the C64. I realised that I preferred creating games to playing them. Unfortunately, my playtesting ability reflected this…

03 M.U.L.E. (ATARI 800)
Could there be more fun for four players? A late-night favourite with Canvas and ex-Imagine friends.

04 Survivor (ATARI 800)
Actually, there could be more fun for four players, and it was this! It had a single spaceship being simultaneously controlled by one player steering, another thrusting and the other two operating different weapons. Total anarchy as everyone shouts over everyone else telling them what they should be doing.

05 David's Midnight Magic (ATARI ST)
While I had an Atari ST as a development machine (I was still writing for the C64) this was the only game that I played, and once I started, I couldn't stop until I'd beaten my previous high score. In the end, I had to cut the disk in half to stop me losing work time.

06 Sega Rally (PC)
I played this obsessively and exclusively with the Delta Integrale, one of which I've had rusting gently away in the garage for nearly 20 years now.

07 Civilisation II (PC)
An addictive board game-like experience. I stopped playing it when I looked around at all the Post-It reminders of what I had to remember to do in the game and decided it was becoming too much like work – by this time I was an IT manager, far away from the games industry.

08 Panzer General 2 (PC)
Wargaming has always been one of my main interests and this felt close to the 'real thing'. Wargaming that is, not actual war! It's the last game I played, more than ten years ago now.

Saboteur II: Avenging Angel

SO MANY ANDROIDS… SO LITTLE TIME…



» ZX SPECTRUM » DURELL SOFTWARE » 1987

Clive Townsend's *Saboteur* proved to be an incredibly popular game for Durell Software, so much so in fact that a sequel was released in 1987, two years after *Saboteur*'s release.

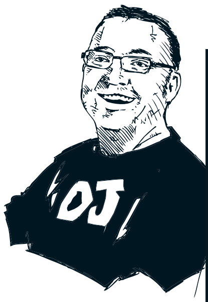
The game's plot followed on from the first game, with the game revealing that the original ninja from *Saboteur* has been killed, and his sister, Nina, was out to avenge him. This involved Nina hang gliding into a well-armed base, retrieving 14 pieces of punched tape and escaping on a high-powered motorcycle. Easy peasy, right?

While Nina wasn't the first female protagonist we'd ever played in a game (*Ms. Pac-Man* is one of the first that springs to mind) it was still rare to see them star in games during the mid-Eighties and it's a credit to Clive Townsend that he decided to make a female the focus of his game, even if it did has very little impact on *Saboteur*'s actual gameplay. For, you see, Nina is every bit the counterpart of her deceased brother, being able to punch, kick, and use a variety of different weapons as she scoured the huge base.

Gameplay-wise it was extremely similar to the original, although admittedly much harder. It's fortunate then that Nina had a variety of weapons she could pick up which allowed her to deal with the pumas and androids that patrolled the huge complex. Sadly, the biggest change over the original (the chance to ride the motorcycle featured on the front cover) came far too late in the game and was over too quickly. It was great fun while it lasted, though. *




947
TIMER
NOTHING NEAR

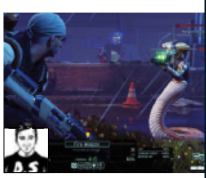


>> It's an exciting time for reviews. We take a look at the new River City Ransom game, take a look at XCOM 2 and the latest Paper Mario game and discover if one of the greatest on-rails shooters of all time gets better with VR

★ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Rez Infinite
If I'm not editing the mag next month it's because normal reality no longer appeals to me.



DREW
XCOM 2
This has absolutely ruined my fingernails. The stakes are higher and the aliens are meaner – it's amazingly nerve-shredding.



River City: Tokyo Rumble

IT PACKS A PUNCH, BUT IT'S NOT THAT HARD

INFORMATION

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS
» **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £24.99
» **PUBLISHER:** NATSUME
» **DEVELOPER:** ARC SYSTEM WORKS
» **PLAYERS:** 1-4



It's always tricky when you resurrect a classic game for a new generation of gamers. Add too many new mechanics and you risk alienating fans of the original release, but if you make it too authentic, you might bore those gamers who expect a bit more for their money. It's admittedly a difficult thing to get right, but *River City: Tokyo Rumble* just about manages it.

There's no denying that *Tokyo Rumble* feels like a game from the NES era, but this in part is purposeful. It's most noticeable with the game's graphical style, which does its best to mimic the iconic design of the NES original – right down to the use of scanlines. Lead character Kunio and the rest of the gang look like slightly-enhanced NES characters, while the animation has also been scaled back to make it look as authentic as possible. The numerous Japanese locations that Kunio and his friends battle through look a little samey, but that's also true of the NES original. The end result is that *Tokyo Rumble* has a old-school appeal that will make you feel like you're back in the late Eighties.

This charm also extends to the many references that can be found in Arc System Works' game. References to both *Renegade* and the *Kunio-kun* series in general are abundant – the jaunty remixed tunes sound excellent for example – but many other games are also mentioned or referred to, revealing *Tokyo Rumble* to be a true homage to the era. Yes, it doesn't always work (Kunio constantly referring to his teacher as 'babe' feels a little out of place) but for the most part the references work well.

If we're honest, *Tokyo Rumble*'s story is best described as weak. After being manipulated into starting a fight, Kunio discovers that a new gang is intent on taking over Tokyo. Kunio is having none of this and puts together a group of



» [3DS] Completing levels add new characters, ensuring your choices when playing Rumble are always varied.

BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *River City Ransom* was released in 1989 in Japan, where it was known as *Downtown Nekketsu Monogatari*. It's part of the larger *Kunio-kun* series, which includes the likes of *Renegade*, *Super Dodge Ball* and *Crash 'N' The Boys: Street Challenge*. An update, *River City Ransom EX*, was released for the Game Boy Advance in 2004, and was the first game in the series to drop the two-player mode and introduce an AI-controlled partner.

★ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
DOUBLE DRAGON (ARCADE)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
DRAGON'S CROWN (PS VITA)





» [3DS] Rumble is surprisingly good fun, but we did occasionally experience lag while playing off one cartridge.



friends in order to take his rivals down. Of course, he needs to earn the respect of his buddies, meaning he'll have to beat them all up in order to prove his worth. It's not the most exciting premise, but the premise for most scrolling fighters is weak at best, so in that way, *Tokyo Rumble* stays true to its roots.

If the story is something of a disappointment the same cannot be said for *Tokyo Rumble*'s fun fighting system. You'll want to fiddle around with the initial button layout, but once you've done that you'll discover the combat engine to be surprisingly solid. Initially you're limited to simple punches, kicks and flying kicks, but as you explore the streets of Tokyo, you'll discover a variety of books that contain a wide range of moves that greatly expand your skillset. Spinning enemies around so they knock into others, damage inflicting judo throws and rapid-fire kicks are just a few of the moves you can unlock, which is handy, as *Tokyo Rumble* can be quite tough in places. Of course, you don't have to rely on just your fists and feet as the streets of Tokyo are littered with useful objects that make great weapons. Bats, knives and chains are all lying around, doing varying amounts of damage, but even more mundane items like bikes or bins can be turned into dangerous weapons.

It's important that the combat system of *Tokyo Rumble* is so solid, because the game itself gets quite tough, rather quickly. Each area of Tokyo is essentially a level in itself with its own unique gang. As Kunio and his friends level up, some groups will always be quick and easy fodder, while others take an insane amount of punishment before they fall. Interestingly, the story mode of *Tokyo Rumble* only supports a single player, which adds to the game's difficulty. Luckily, as Kunio recruits new members, one of them will help out in brawls, lasting as long as their energy holds out. The AI for the most part works well, but your helper always seems less interested in picking up cash and items, which means you may miss out on goodies. It's a little too grindy for our liking too, meaning boss fights can be quite tough. Fortunately, a shop allows you to complete jobs that can boost your money or give you useful items.

Tokyo Rumble is a fun brawler, but it isn't without its issues. The gameplay gets repetitive quickly, and while there's the option to increase Kunio's stats by buying new items of clothing or eating meals at restaurants, it's not as comprehensive a system as found in games such as *Odin Sphere*. There's little



to drag you back once you've completed the game, but it's a great tribute to the NES original – those expecting more depth may be disappointed, though. *

In a nutshell

The lack of co-op in the story mode does hurt *Tokyo Rumble* somewhat, but it remains an entertaining brawler with some genuinely satisfying combat. What a shame, then, that it's over so quickly.

6
RetroGamer_Mag scored 6 for
River City: Tokyo Rumble
Follow our scores on JUST A SC...

DODGING AND PUNCHING

While there is no co-operative mode in *Tokyo Rumble*, multiplayer games are available to play. Rumble plays very similarly to the main story mode, but up to four players can punch each other about until only one of them is left. Dodgeball (which can also be accessed at certain points of the main game) is also included and again caters for four players. It's another last-man-standing affair, but this time you can only use a dodgeball as a weapon, meaning you need to catch your opponent's throws and chuck it straight back at them. Both games are fun and it's possible to connect off a single 3DS, but it is a shame that there's no online play available.





RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download

Rez Infinite

» **System:** PS4/PS VR » **Publisher:** Enhance Games
» **Cost:** £24.99 ($40 physical) » **Buy it from:** Online, iam8bit.com (physical)

Remember when you saw *Tron* and wished you could have your own adventure *inside* a videogame? That's what playing *Rez Infinite* feels like. Terms like 'incredibly immersive', 'it's like you're actually there', and 'so real I could touch it' have been thrown about since VR first became a thing, but it's so, so true for this reimagining of Sega's on-rail shooter.

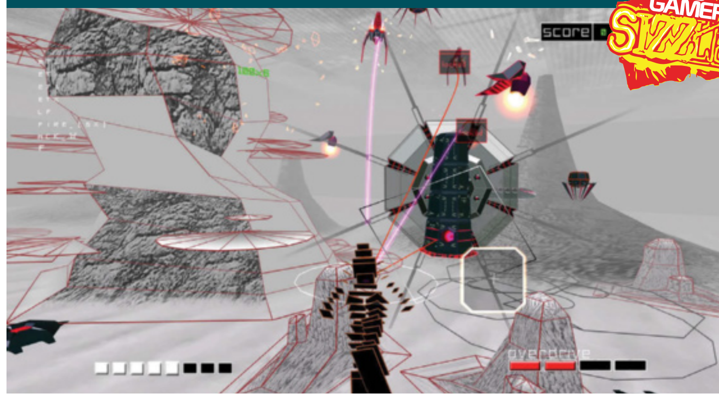
Rez has always been an immersive experience but that feeling is greatly amplified once you play it in VR. From the moment you find yourself floating in the inky blackness of Area 1 to your final showdown with Area 5's magnificent boss, the virtual world of *Rez* engulfs you utterly and is filled with genuinely jaw-dropping moments. The scale is the first thing that hits you. Bosses look gigantic, while you'll crane your neck in wonder to gawp at the abstract alien objects that float menacingly above you. Witnessing the cruiser that appears halfway through Area 5 feels like that first encounter with the Star Destroyer in *Star Wars*, while the ability to whip your head around in the virtual space order to catch escaping enemies feels revelatory.

Aside from the new control system, it's still the same old *Rez*, but somehow it feels complete, like a part of it has been missing all these years and it's now been made whole. It's the same game you've been playing for the past 15 years, but it's arguably the best it has ever been, particularly when you realise it's now running at a stunning 1080p. However, it's Area X that gets us most excited for *Rez*'s future, as it's effectively a 20-minute demo of what a new *Rez* could be. You now have complete free movement, which adds further to the immersion and encourages you to explore the amazing looking environment. We've heard it described as everything from a 'religious experience', to a 'visual orgasm' and it's easy to see how those comparisons are made – so compelling is the feeling it bestows on you.

Rez may be 15 years old, but it's never felt more relevant. The *Rez* you knew and loved is dead, long live *Rez Infinite*.

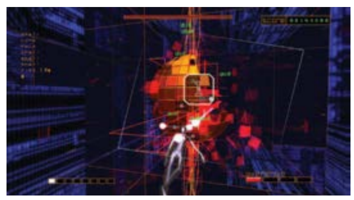
10 — RetroGamer_Mag scored **10** for Rez Infinite
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

✱ PICK OF THE MONTH

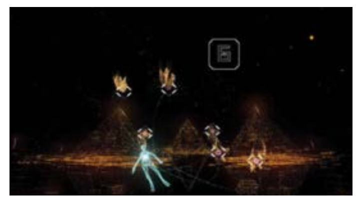


» [PS4] Area 5 has always been astonishing to play through, but it reaches a whole new level of awesomeness in VR.

> "Rez might be 15 years old, but it's never felt more relevant"



» [PS4] Bosses are satisfyingly tough to beat, with different forms based on how many enemies you blast.



» [PS4] Worry not, even if you don't have PlayStation VR you can still experience *Rez Infinite* on your PS4.

Paper Mario: Color Splash

» **System:** Wii U » **Buy it for:** £34.99 » **Buy it from:** Retail, Online

We're conflicted over *Color Splash*. There's no denying that it has a very funny and clever script and it looks glorious – thanks to some very realistic textures – but it still feels lacking. It's clever how Mario uses paint to interact with the scenery around him, and we love the design of many of the levels, but there's too much here that stops it from achieving greatness.

Our biggest issue is the combat system, which shoehorns in the Wii U's touchscreen. It makes combat a chore and is made worse by the fact that combat no longer earns you EXP (the RPG mechanics have been completely stripped out). We wouldn't mind, but you're constantly thrust into combat with little reward for your efforts. *Color Splash* is a fun game, but once you get past the clever touches there's very little substance to it.

6 — RetroGamer_Mag scored **6** for Paper Mario: Color Splash
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



» [Wii U] The effects are undeniably wonderful to look at, but it's not enough to distract from the irritating gameplay mechanics.

XCOM 2

» **System:** PS4 (tested), Xbox One, PC » **Buy it for:** £44.99 » **Buy it from:** Retail, Online

Those of you who played *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* will look back at those moments with the 1000-yard-stare of a war veteran. 'You don't know man, *you weren't there*!' you say to the uninitiated, such was the game's affect on your wellbeing – yet you still admit that you had a good time playing it, amongst all the horror.

You'll be pleased, and maybe a bit horrified, to learn that *XCOM 2* is a significant evolution on *Enemy Unknown* on all fronts. Fights are more tactical, with humanity employing quick hit-and-run skirmishes on its oppressors; the stakes are higher, as enemies are stronger; and XCOM itself is more badass: your teammates can literally shank aliens right through the brain.

What more could you want from an strategy RPG?

9 — RetroGamer_Mag scored **9** for XCOM 2
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



» [PS4] There is a much wider variety of enemies to fight, from indoctrinated, human-like soldiers to terrifying snakes.

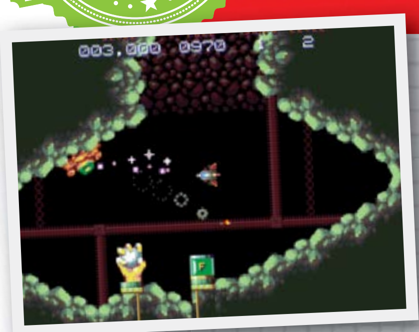
Gamers Homebrew

Brewing since 2005

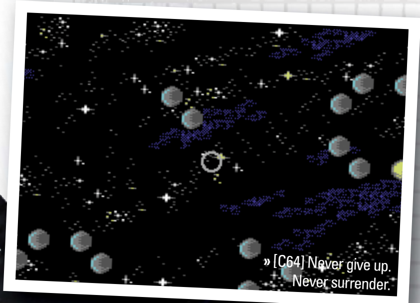


» [ZX Spectrum] Pay attention! You will follow me in my little tank.

Gaming News



» [Windows] It's just a thrust to the left.



» [C64] Never give up. Never surrender.

CHUNKS OF DATA

The prolific developer Gabriele Amore has been working away and his newest release is *Chunk Zone,* a third-person shooter with an appropriately-chunky tank. The objective of the game is to trundle around while shooting the incoming projectiles. There are two varieties to deal with and a quota of destruction must be reached before progressing. Kikstart.eu/chunk-zone-spec drives over to the World Of Spectrum forum for Gabriele's original announcement where the game can be downloaded, although that was soon accompanied by a more-than-slightly-bizarre off-topic discussion, which ultimately culminated in what appears to be a reskinned version of the game called *Ferret Buster*!

Amiga gamers with AGA-based systems will want to keep an eye out for *AlarCity* from newly-minted developer Pixelglass – it was behind the recent overhaul, *Great Giana Sisters* – which is slated to be a fast-moving top-down shooter. The relevant page on its website is at Kikstart.eu/alarcity-amiga, where there's an embedded YouTube video as well, which shows off the game in its current state. There's also a link over to their store at Itch.io where an early preview of the game's survival mode is a free download.

One recent surprise came from long-serving homebrew publishers Protovision, which announced a free expansion pack for its 2006 release *Advanced Space Battle*. This is a very good space-bound strategy game which shipped with quite a few possible play modes, but developer More.Gore Software stated in a note on one of the data disk images that it had always planned to expand the game further in this way… it just took a while! Owners of the original can find the download at Kikstart.eu/asb-data-c64 along with information on ordering the game itself for those who'd like to try their hand at dominating the entire galaxy.

The official website hidden behind Kikstart.eu/gravitus-pc says that *Gravitus Minus* is inspired by classic games such as *Gravitar*, *Thrust* and *Solar Jetman*. The stages all have an orb somewhere within their caverns which must be picked up with a tow rope and removed to safety. There are the physics to deal with, automated defences to avoid or blast and the ship has limited fuel so more must be siphoned from storage units dotted around the caves. There are Windows and Linux versions of the game and it sports some lovely attention to detail in the graphics and sound departments.



» [SG-1000] The familiar platforms, but now on another platform!

SIMILAR BUT DIFFERENT

We tempted fate in issue 159 by saying that conversions of the Mojon Twins' platformer *Uwol Quest For Money* had stopped appearing, so naturally another version has popped up, this time called *Super Uwol*, appearing right on our doorstep!

The target platform is the Sega SG-1000, but the game has also been reworked during conversion to add a second player – controlling former evil sorceress Meemaid – and the Storm Palace has been refurbished as well. Kikstart.eu/uwol-sg1000 delves into the Twins' website and we're wondering if these upgrades will be retrofitted into older versions?

> "The game has also been reworked during conversion to add a second player"



» [C64] War – it's fantastic!

NO HOBOS REQUIRED

Shotgun is a game for two-to-four players and the ultimate goal is very simple: kill your friends! There are seven battle arenas to select from which can be played in a choice of three colours, and each player appears in their own spawning point unarmed and must make their way to one of the freely-available guns without being mown down before they can come out shooting.

Kikstart.eu/shotgun-c64 heads over to the developer's website, which in turn includes a link to information on the supported four-player adapter.

HOMEBREW HEROES

Christian Gleinser is the developer behind the action game Shotgun on the C64 which uses a user port player adapter to allow up to four human players to blast each other. We grabbed him for a quick chat



THE BIG INTERVIEW
CHRISTIAN GLEINSER

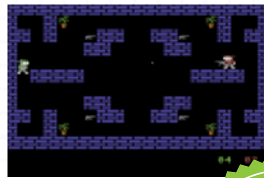
Where did the idea for *Shotgun* come from?

I was playing a bunch of eight-player games on the Atari XL (using the Multijoy8 interface) on a retro gaming party. They play those games there every time, and all of them have something in common: they are very simple in regards to both gameplay and graphics, and are very much fun to play. And it's only a handful of games that are available for the Multijoy8. When I noticed that the situation is similar for the C64 and its four-player interface, I decided to provide the community with a new game, which would share the 'simple-graphics-simple-gameplay-lots-of-fun' principle of those Atari games.

For inspiration, I dug out an older game written in Python for a 'small source code' competition among coworkers which was called *2-Player Death Match*. I then created a mock-up screenshot in C64-style graphics for a four-player deathmatch game, and this eventually became *Shotgun*.

And how long did it take to develop from start to finish?

The first prototype was written in Python, it was finished after one week. After that, the recoding in 6502 assembly began, which took about three and a half weeks.



» [C64] About to be caught in the crossfire.

How easy was programming for Protovision's four-player adapter?

It's very easy, there is an example on the Protovision website where all four joystick states get queried and put into four bytes of RAM. This whole example is about 20-30 lines long and you can simply copy it into your own code.

What sort of feedback have you had from C64 gamers?

So far, many people have really liked it, and have sent me pictures or even videos of their retro gaming group playing the game on real hardware and so on. That's really the nicest kind of feedback!

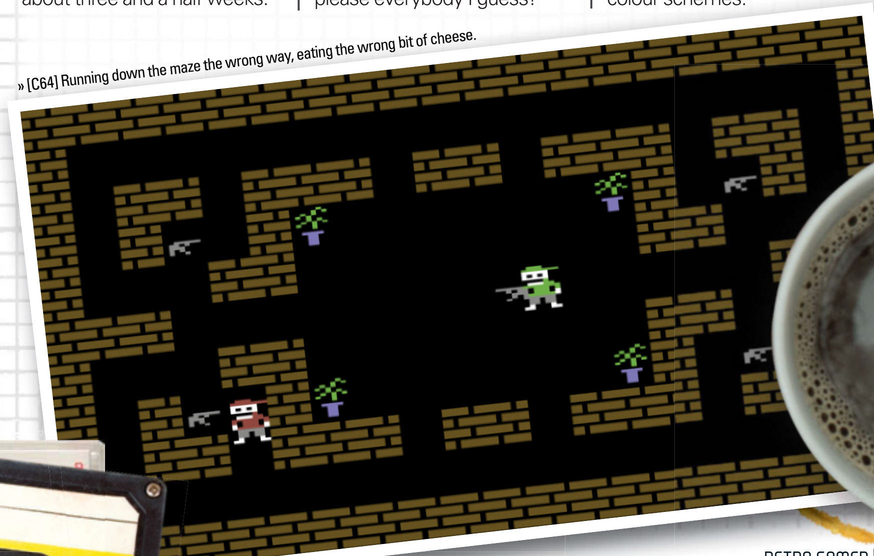
That said, I don't really think I had any negative feedback. Some gamers expressed their discontent about not having enough C64-interested friends to play with, which is of course the downside of multiplayer-only games. But, well, you can't please everybody I guess!

Some people compared the game a little bit to *Wizard Of Wor*, which is pretty cool because I love this game – and it's actually the second game I ever played in my whole life, *Park Patrol* was the first. On the other hand, I play *Wizard Of Wor* cooperatively, so for me it's still a different game. Maybe it's the blue walls…

Is there anything you'd do differently?

I am pleased with the result, but there are many ideas which I had, but decided not to implement, since it would have interfered too much with the 'simple gameplay' principle. I noted down all the ideas, and some of them may become part of *Shotgun 2*. The only thing I wish I had put into the first game already is an 'auto/random' selection mode for the arenas and colour schemes.

» [C64] Running down the maze the wrong way, eating the wrong bit of cheese.



DO YOU REMEMBER?

Small Change's *Luna Landa* for the C64 was released in 1993 and is, despite the name, based on the Taito coin-op *Lunar Rescue*. The player is handed control of a lunar module, first guiding its course downwards from the safety of the dropship towards a landing pad on the lunar surface to pick up some passengers and then heading upwards again, this time with the option of demolishing a path through the now hostile aliens patrolling the skies.

Getting a good score is all about timing the start of each journey and using the limited fuel supply for the thrusters – which either launch the craft upwards at speed whilst heading towards the base or stop its ascent – to weave between or line up shots at the UFOs. Kikstart.eu/landa-c64 will take you to the moon.



» [C64] A perilous descent to the base.



» [C64] Blasting off into a sky full of UFOs.





» [Amstrad CPC] Building a maze to keep the invaders busy and under fire.

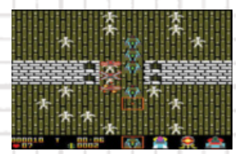
DEFENCE

» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC » **DEVELOPER:** SHINING » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DEFENCE-CPC » **PRICE:** FREE / €20

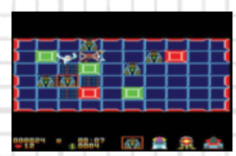
Defence's story starts on Earth in the year 2633 as the armies of the Red Falcon are taken on in battle by two heroes, Lance Gryzor and Bill Rizer. Ultimately, humanity wins the battle but that victory comes with a price: both warriors are severely injured, Lance is captured by the Red Falcon himself and Bill is placed into cryostasis by the human-created support robots called Probotectors in the hope that time would heal him. Fast-forwarding in time another 85 years finds Bill completely healed, but only just being awakened because the Red Falcon's forces have returned for a second attempt on the planet, this time led by an apparently-brainwashed Lance Gryzor!

To save the world from this latest assault and his former compatriot, Bill Rizer must keep the troops from sensitive targets. This is done by placing weapons within the play area which, when an enemy gets nearby, will start shooting. There are four units available to utilise, each costs money to push into service and some are specifically for ground- or air-based enemies. The path that attackers will take across the screen is in part governed by where defences are placed so careful positioning can slow the intruders down and funnel them past the artillery. There are upgrades to tip things in the player's favour a little if enough money can be raised for them, but to begin with they're completely out of reach – progress can be preserved by saving it to the disk.

Defence is a difficult game to the point where the manual mentions that only some of the early levels can be completed without upgrading the weapons so, although it'll appeal to existing fans of tower defence-style titles, beginners to the genre will probably find it a challenge to play and, although reading the manual helps, there's really no substitute for trial, error and persistence. A free version can be downloaded from the developer's website and there's the option of paying either ten Euros for a personalised digital version or 20 Euros for a physical copy.



» [Amstrad CPC] Things really aren't going well, there's too many routes open!



» [Amstrad CPC] We can't be consumed by our petty differences anymore.

8 RetroGamer_Mag scored **8** for Defence
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

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TREASURES OF ALI-GAR

» **FORMAT:** WINDOWS/WEB » **PRICE:** FREE
» **DEVELOPER:** GARBENJAMIN
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/ALI-GAR-WIN

Inspired by the rare, but well thought of, *Key Quest* on the VIC-20, *The Treasures Of Ali-Gar* is a single-screen maze game where some of the titular trinkets are scattered around the play area. To move onto the next screen, the player must gather all of these riches up and find the key that will then appear before legging it to the exit door.

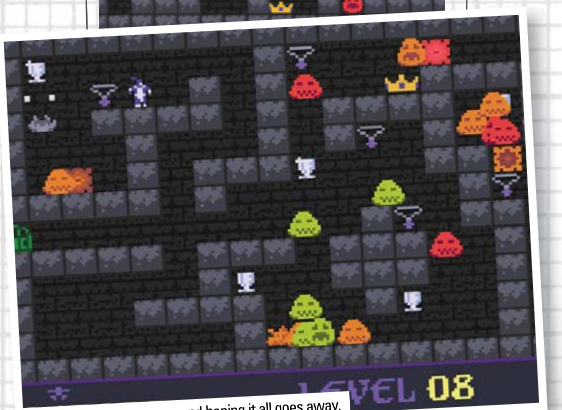
Making things significantly harder are generators which create roaming nasties. Since the screen gets busy quite rapidly and both the units and the creatures they spawn can be blasted, it makes sense to deal with the majority of both before going in search of goodies.

This game can either be downloaded or played online – we did the latter for the review – and it's simple but reasonably addictive fun. Getting acclimatised to the tile-by-tile player movement and aiming to take out enemies is a must.

7 — RetroGamer_Mag scored **7** for
The Treasures Of Ali-Gar
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

» [Web] Catching one of the enemies off guard in a narrow corridor.





» [Web] Hiding in a corner and hoping it all goes away.

SUPER ROBIN

» **FORMAT:** AMIGA CD32 » **DEVELOPER:** CHRIS CLARKE
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SUPER-ROBIN-CD32 » **PRICE:** FREE

Created with the *Reality Game Engine*, *Super Robin* is an action platformer where the titular bird must bravely dash through hazardous scrolling backgrounds in search of fruit because there's a quota required to open the exit. Robin has patrolling creatures, pits filled with spikes and a time limit working against him, and will need to utilise doorways and springs in order to access other parts of the stage.

This is an entertaining, if challenging, platform game with some lovely presentation and we did find it enjoyable to play, but it does have to be noted that there are issues in the collisions. Only Robin's right half appears to pick up fruit whilst the detection of impacts with the patrolling nasties are sometimes frustratingly strict. It's relatively easy to play around these quirks after learning how to though, so CD32 owners should burn out the image and give it a try.

7 — RetroGamer_Mag scored **7** for
Super Robin
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

» [CD32] Is it a bird, is it a plane? Oh, it was a bird!







ROUNDUP

The C64 has received a couple of brain-teasing titles from Digital Monastry. The first is *World Conquest*, a strategy game which the developers describe as a reworking of *Risk* that adds extra elements to the gameplay such as economic factors to make some regions of the map more productive than others. This was written in the Nineties but remained unreleased until recently when the author, Andrea Rosa, recovered his work; the game can be downloaded at Kikstart.eu/world-conquest-c64.

The second release is a port of the VIC-20 roguelike *Demons Of Dex* where would-be role players crawl their way through creature-laden dungeons in search of untold riches, hopefully without being unceremoniously slaughtered by a nasty beast in the process. That dangerous quest begins at the dungeon entrance behind Kikstart.eu/demons-dex-c64.

GOLDEN TAIL

» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC » **DEVELOPER:** JUAN J MARTÍNEZ » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/GOLDEN-TAIL-CPC » **PRICE:** FREE

The titular Golden Tail is an odd artefact with great power, but its use comes at a price; anyone wielding the stone will have their true nature revealed and amplified, so the shogun, using it for an assault on Osaka Castle, became the embodiment of evil, summoning monsters and causing the lands to rot away.

The artefact was therefore split into 30 fragments and spread all over the land but there's a theory that reassembling it will allow the user to undo the damage, so Kitsune the ninja spy decides to put said theory to the test and he'll have to use his magical powers – rendering him invisible, invulnerable and more agile – to reach out of the way places and avoid rather than fight the vile creatures. This is a mission that will challenge even experienced platforming fans, requiring precise control of Kitsune and mastery of his magic.

8 — RetroGamer_Mag scored **8** for
Golden Tail
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



» [Amstrad CPC] Runs like a spirit by the castle walls.



» [Amstrad CPC] This was a National Trust site until the demons took over.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN! Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one



STAR LETTER

PEEKING BEHIND THE CURTAIN



Credit: Realfintogive

» Nintendo's NES Test Station was used by authorised repair centres to diagnose faults.

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I've always been fascinated by the things you weren't really meant to see in gaming. Prototype games, censored content, those sorts of things excite me. Largely, you guys are pretty good about covering them with things like the occasional Games That Weren't features.

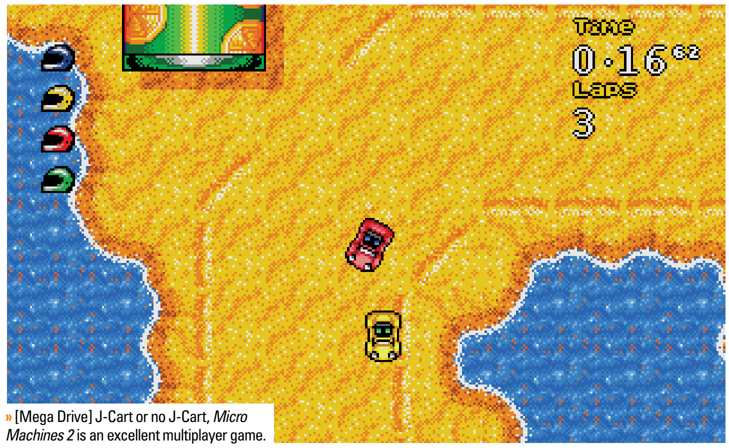
However, there's one particular class of hardware that gets me weirdly excited, and that's mass-produced stuff that was never meant for purchase by consumers. Development kits, multi-cartridge demo kiosks for retailers, items like the Super Famicom Box for hotels, Famicom Disk Writer stations, the old *Pokémon Snap* photo printing stations and even the distribution cartridges used to give out Pokémon at events. This hardware ends up leaking out to consumers, even though it's not meant to – I'd love to know how, and what was meant to happen to them.

Have you ever done a feature on these devices, and if not do you think there's scope to do one in the future? It might not be everyone's cup of tea, sure, but I think that there's a certain audience which will be super interested in these oddities from videogaming.

Simon Crane

No, we've never done anything quite like that. It's an interesting topic for sure, but given the non-retail nature of such hardware, it can be hard to come across such devices. Worse yet, given the size of many of them, it's harder to get them to the office.

Still, if we ever get the opportunity to get a good selection of these together, we'd love to do a feature on those oddities. After all, Nick would relish the opportunity to prise open some rarities, to see exactly what lurked inside a Famicom Disk Writer or a NES Test Station – and we reckon others would like it too.



» [Mega Drive] J-Cart or no J-Cart, *Micro Machines 2* is an excellent multiplayer game.

NO J, OKAY?

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
While I picked up issue 159 for the article on *Streets of Rage II* (which was excellent and had me cracking out the Mega Drive for the first time in almost a year), the 30 Years Of Codemasters piece caught my eye because it made me realise you're probably the guys to ask about something that's baffled me for many a moon.

Back in about 1996 or so, I'd bought *Micro Machines '96*. I loved it and its J-Cart magic, so when I saw *Micro Machines 2* going cheap (I think it was in Woolworths) I splashed out. However, my cart of *Micro Machines 2* lacked the famous J-Cart! I've never come across this anywhere else, all other references to the game talk up the J-Cart feature.

Would you know why this was? My guess is a cheaper print run to get some extra cash out of an aging game – this was a good two years after *Micro Machines 2*'s release, after all. It didn't matter in the long run as frankly I preferred *Micro Machines '96* anyway (that track editor!). So is this a particularly rare/interesting cart? Have you guys ever encountered it?

Keep up the good work!

Sam Bridgett

We happen to know the answer to this one, and just as you'd suspected it's a cheaper rerelease. If you've still got the box for your copy of *Micro Machines 2*, you should notice a copyright date of 1996 on the back – the original J-Cart versions are dated 1994. Both versions are easy to find these days, with the original release being the more common of the two. Luckily for those of you that snagged one of the later editions, the four-player functionality is preserved via the Mega Drive multitap.

RAGE ON

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I really enjoyed your article on the making of *Streets Of Rage II* with its insight into the development of it. Is there any chance you will be doing a making of *Streets Of Rage 3*? I only ask as there were a lot of changes to the Western version and certain things were cut out in the final game, such as stages that involved riding bikes, and it would be interesting to find out why these changes were made.

Chris Guera

We'd love to do it, as you rightly point out that there's an interesting story to tell with *Streets Of Rage 3* – the developmental changes, music and bizarre localisation are all worth talking about. Right now



» [Mega Drive] *Streets Of Rage 3* is a game we'd love to get a Making Of for, just to explain the music.

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we don't have it planned for any specific issue, though.

BONZE MEDAL

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I have been buying the mag for years and I just love it. But let's cut to the chase, there are some great arcade platformers that get little or no coverage at all.

The arcade games I am referring to are Namco's *Shadowland*, Taito's *Wardner* and *Bonze Adventure*. I would love to see these quirky games get the recognition they deserve. They are filled with secrets, different endings and power-ups. I played all of them when I was a kid and I still play them in MAME, on my PC or my handheld JXD S7800B. Please give them some coverage.

The coverage of *Slap Fight* was just spot-on, thank you!

John Tviland Bakken

As with *Slap Fight*, you're most likely to see these covered as Ultimate Guides, though we've not planned them in the near future. We'll add them to the list of things to cover, though!

SHALL WE DANCE?

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I love *Shadow Dancer*! I have fond memories of seeing it in the arcade and remember the cool husky dog companion that grapples with enemies so you can defeat them easier.

Unfortunately the MAME version crashes on the second boss. On the Master System version I can get the last boss down to one bar of energy. I also like the alternative version on the Mega Drive which unfairly got a bad review in *C&VG* at the time (in my opinion). Even the Amiga version is good! Although your ninja's legs are really short for some reason. As they are on all the computer versions.

Have you ever done a feature on it? If not do you plan to? I would love to read it.

Tom Wedley

We've covered the different versions of *Shadow Dancer* in issue 77 and did a Boss Rush on it in issue 37, but we've never done an in-depth feature on the game as a whole. Consider it part of the (rather long) shortlist of games we'd like to cover in the future.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

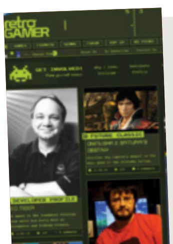
Limited Edition Games

How annoying is it when you buy a special collector's edition of a game, only to find that it doesn't contain all of the special tat in the main box? If you are Darran Jones, it is 150 per cent more annoying.





» [Arcade] Ninjas and dogs, together at last. What could be better? Ninjas and golf, according to Atari…



From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Redesigned hardware



» The PlayStation was revised and miniaturised and emerged as the PSone

RetroBob
I'm okay with it in principle: modern redesigns have increased specs, though if you look back to the Mega Drive II, the sound was not as good as the original MD.

merman
I held off buying a DS until the Lite version arrived. Seems that new hardware is almost certain to go through a redesign. But then I prefer the chunky original PlayStation and PS2 to the smaller, later models…

ianpmarks
Depends really. If it improves on the original – like the DS or Game Boy then I'd rather have the redesign. If it's just a different design, like with the 2600 Jr. or the Mega Drive II, or the Spectrum+ etc, then I'd rather have the original.

The Laird
The best one for me will always be the Lynx II, not only was it smaller but it also had much better battery life, a backlight button, easier to access card slot, hand grips and numerous other design improvements.

Megamixer
If a newer model is capable of more functions without *losing* anything then obviously, it's worth considering. Aesthetically, though, it has to be the originals. Compare the MD, MCD, 32X 'stack' with the MDII equivalent setup and uglier side-loading MCDII!

ncf1
No sentimentalism for me, give me the one that functions best and has best features, I want my games to look, play, and sound the best they possibly can.

necronom
The original versions for me, which just happen to be the ones I had. I rebought a C64 (original case), original 1541 drive, VCS (six-switch Woody), and I have my original Kickstart 1.2 A500 (not that modern 1.3 version).

kiwimike
It really does depend on whether the redesign makes a significant improvement or not. With the Segas, I will always prefer the SMS and MD originals over the new ones, back with the C64 I liked the new design.

retro GAMER

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For all subscription enquiries:
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www.imaginesubs.co.uk

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Printing & Distribution
Printed by Southernprint Ltd, 17-21 Factory Road, Upton Industrial Estate, Poole, Dorset, BH16 5SN
☎ 01202 628 300

Distributed in the UK, Eire & Rest of the World by: Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
☎ 0203 787 9060
www.marketforce.co.uk

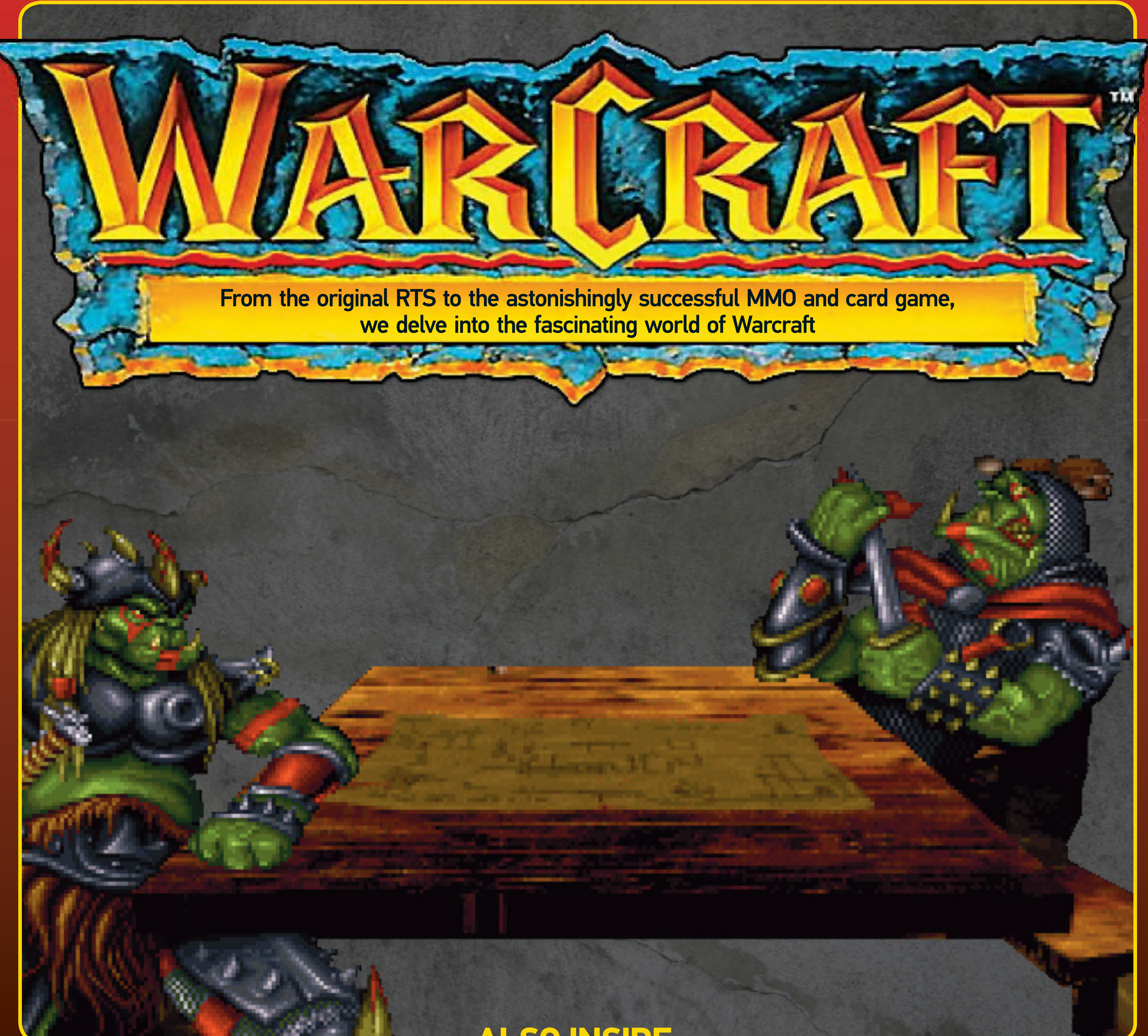
Distributed in Australia by: Gordon & Gotch Australia Pty Ltd, 26 Rodborough Road, Frenchs Forest NSW 2086 Australia
☎ +61 2 9972 880
www.gordongotch.com.au

ISSN 1742-3155

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ENDGAME



THE SIMPSONS: BART VS THE SPACE MUTANTS

» The first Simpsons game to make it to market was a bit of a mixed bag – it had plenty of the show's characteristic humour, but the difficulty was set so absurdly high that you'd have had more joy trying to talk Mr Burns into lending you a tenner. For those of you that understandably never persisted, here's what happens when Bart's mischief results in a victory for the Earthlings…



01

» The two space mutants lament their failure to invade Earth, all because one serial underachiever decided he should stop them. Incidentally, these guys aren't Kang and Kodos because the show hadn't yet established them as antagonistic.



02

» Are the aliens mad? Will they summon a battle fleet to send the entire planet up in smoke? Apparently not. They instead remark on the pluck and courage shown by our favourite cartoon troublemaker in stopping their dastardly plan.



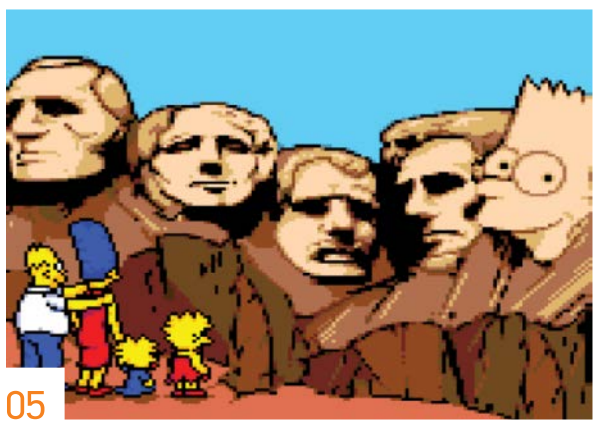
03

» Wait a minute. The extra-terrestrials have gone beyond grudging acceptance of defeat, and veered into outright admiration of their foe. They're no longer ruminating on his fine qualities, they've decided to make a public show of honour.



04

» The subordinate alien declares that he's got a plan to honour Bart Simpson, defender of the planet. At this point we're hoping this is part of an alien martial code, because otherwise we have to assume that their hearts weren't really in the whole invasion and they could have spared us the hassle.



05

» The Simpsons, in an off-camera moment not captured because it doesn't involve any of Homer's wacky shenanigans, stop by Mount Rushmore to see that Bart's image has been added to it. Bart doesn't seem to be present with the family, though. Let's hope it's just his image in that mountain face…